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COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS
TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 3214.

A MODERN CORSAIR.

BY

RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE.

IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. I.

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(Continued on page 3 of cover.)

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A
MODERN CORSAIR

A STORY OF THE LEVANT

BY

RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE,

AUTHOR OF

"MY OFFICIAL WIFE," "CHECKED THROUGH," ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1897.



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A MODERN CORSAIR

BOOK I.

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK.

CHAPTER I.

THE SECRET COMMITTEE OF LLOYDS.

It was the very sloppiest afternoon of a stormy March day, which brought together three sturdy Britons, closely gathered around the fire, in an anteroom of the chambers of Lloyds, in the Royal Exchange at London.

"I don't call to mind a worse day than this for many a long year," sullenly said Chairman Higginbotham, as he gazed at his fellow members of the Secret Committee, which had just been named.

They were now lingering until the crowd of underwriters, called together by the annual meeting of marine insurers for "ninety-four," should melt away into the dreary gloom wrapping that monster city, which has swamped old Londinium in its modern tide. One of

the listeners looked up and gloomily nodded, as he vigorously wielded the poker, and then continued stirring up the dejectedly smouldering coals. "Rough weather at sea!" growled member Thomas Walden, with a presage of professional misfortune.

"Yes, it's a beastly day!" chimed in member Wilson Waddingham, turning away from the window, whence he had gazed out upon a line of dripping umbrellas, spread four abreast. The wearied hansom horses slipped upon the inundated pavements, their drivers meanwhile hurling forth volleys of imprecations from under their streaming storm wraps. The gas blinked dull and yellowish in both street and room. Even the great open hall of Lloyds was shaded in a gloomy penumbra.

"I'll not venture home to-night! Stay in town!" ejaculated Waddingham, as he gazed out into the great rooms, now nearly deserted.

"Very good," answered John Higginbotham. "Then you and Walden can come up and dine with me, and then, we can talk this whole thing over. It's safer so. For I've been already warned that we must not meet here, nor even leave a single scrap of paper to betray us."

"What's up now? Something crooked again?" said Walden, as he angrily thrust the poker deep into the heart of the fire, and then gave it up as a bad job.

"The fact is," whispered Higginbotham, "Komanos and Company are at it again! Now, that's all I can

tell you till we are safe at my house. I have been given full powers, and my secret instructions are only to be divulged to you. The Executive Committee are determined now to get at the truth of the matter, if it costs a hundred thousand pounds, that's all!"

The listeners had approached their chairman, and Walden muttered: "Those Levantines are the very devil's own—that's what they are!"

"I was told to name my associates," continued their chief, "and so I selected you, for I know that we can work well together."

"Delighted, I'm sure!" the juniors cried, and then the chief consulted his sturdy old Frodsham timer. "Let's see! Five now. I dine at seven, sharp. I've a few letters to write. Be on hand, sharp seven!"

With a nod, the others passed out in search of the assorted cloaks, mackintoshes, goloshes, ponderous umbrellas and respirators, which are the only human armour 'gainst raw London fogs and driving British storms.

Solid, stocky men, rosy of face and of cheery mien, this confidential committee of the famous Lloyds was of the unpretentious type of the British merchant. Resolutely clinging to the Albert frock and the impervious British guinea hat, their sober exteriors hardly denoted men whose signatures were good on 'Change for hundreds of thousands of pounds. Good livers, trusty friends, true lovers, honest haters, sound and sweet at the core as Britain's solid apples, the three friends were

all notable figures among the world's greatest underwriters.

In a few moments, Higginbotham saw his friends disappear into two dripping four wheelers, and trundle away to the West End, where the schemes of the city crystallise into the solid comfort of the British home—the hub of the European wheel.

“I wonder what the old Harry is up at Smyrna, now?” mused the committeeman, as he dropped his huge bulk into a chair by the window, and filled the pocket pipe, so dear to the Englishman. “There’s no time to lose, if we would head them off. Let me see! This is the tenth. We could surely get our men out there by April first.”

The old underwriter watched the tide of vehicles pouring along now westward, for your British merchant, stubbornly conservative, comes late and goes early. The blinding gusts of chill rain hid from view the faces of those cowering within the humble hansom or the stately carriage of the bank director.

“I may as well now wire to my man to run up here, at anyrate. I suppose that they’ll give me a free hand, as usual!” cried Higginbotham, as he rang for a page, and then briskly sent off an imperative telegram, addressed “Captain Enos Drage, R. N., St. Aubrey’s Villa, Lenox Road, Southsea.”

“That will fetch the old campaigner in short order!” gleefully ruminated the writer. “He knows every corner of the footstool, and, I will wager, if Enos Drage will

agree to go out there, these fellows will find it's a case of Greek meeting Greek. He is a match for the best of them!"

In half an hour, Higginbotham locked up his desk with a resounding bang, which echoed through the great lonely rooms. His letters duly dispatched, the old merchant grasped his wraps and umbrella and sallied forth to meet his friends, five miles away, around the old mahogany, brought from the West Indies, when even a British fleet had to fight its way. The secret labours before them weighed gloomily upon him.

Standing alone in the main hall, Higginbotham became reminiscent. "Bless me!" he cried. "How this interest has grown since the few sea captains first gathered at Lloyds' dingy coffee rooms in Abchurch lane! Even in 'eighteen twenty-four,' the 'Royal Exchange' and 'London Assurance' were the only companies writing marine policies. To-day, Great Britain carries five-eighths of the cargoes of the world and insures three-quarters. Thousands of millions of pounds at risk annually. And now every ounce of gold that moves in commerce passes, once a year, through London. We get a bit of it, every time, so we do!" he chuckled, with sturdy English pride.

And then the vexing subject of his secret committee labours returned. "There be land rats, and water rats," he growled, as he strode across the vast rooms, and gazed at a huge Mercator's Projection of the Waves, so boldly ruled by Britannia, and the land which only

serves as a rim for good Queen Victoria's watery domain.

"We must block off these fellows' sly little game! At it again, are they? Well, we will see!" muttered the angry old man, as he strode along, brandishing his umbrella in indignation at those distant foes of the British underwriter, "Komanos and Company," of an unsavoury Levantine renown. "We will see. Enos Drage is just the man to fight them!" was the Englishman's final decision, as he stumped down the slippery stairs.

The great rooms were deserted by the members, and the silence was unbroken save by a knot of porters, janitors and messengers, who had now gathered in their own waiting rooms to talk the day's doings over, aided by generous flagons of "bitter."

In the lonely "underwriters' room" there were still lingering a few modestly clad women, timidly poring over the "list of vessels arrived," happiness thrilling the heart of the "sailor's wife," anxious to know of the safety of Jack at sea!

And hard by the fatal "record of marine disasters" also hovered a trinity of pale-faced watchers, whose rusty black told that the worst was already known. And yet, with the fond heart of woman, they came day by day to scan the two enormous ledgers, in hopes that the log of some happy bark might yet tell of "boats picked up at sea," of the survivors of frail raft voyages, of the smoke signal on the lonely sand spit, and of the dead come to life again. For through the grey cloud

of mystery which wraps the cruel waste of waters, the star of hope twinkles ever, though its rays be dimmed, and the straggling light reaches far into the longing heart of Nancy Lee.

Their feet raised no echoes on the floor daily trodden by merchants, ship-owners, brokers, underwriters, and grave-faced messengers.

Around the walls were clustered nautical instruments of quaint design—the giant self-registering anemometer and the anemoscope. In dusty corners, the standard barometers, solemnly swung there in haughty scorn of the clap-trap aneroids, with their staring white baby faces and their unreliable hands. Filled with shining mercury, the old “reliables” were vowed to the service of that winged god, patron alike of thief, voyager and smug trader. Vast rolls of maps, and great atlases of yellowed charts, decorated wall and table.

The huge oaken chairs spread out their hospitable arms to clasp again the pompous merchant, with his pendulous lip and crafty eye, as he listened to eager agent or bluff captain, bound in blue and brass, so redolent of oakum, tar and “marine stores.”

Here, the “registered members of Lloyds” annually risk three hundreds of millions of dollars in chances on floating hulls and cargoes. The tidy little sum of sixty millions of the red sovereigns bearing the perennial smile of Victoria, by the grace of God Queen of the United Kingdom and Empress of India!

From this great room, a thousand filaments of talking

wires and cables reach out to the uttermost parts of the earth! To this room, for the austere records of "Lloyds' List," four thousand agents send telegrams, the mere cost of transmission rolling up to a king's yearly revenue. The nerve centre of the marine trade of the world is here in this dingy hall.

In the vast adjoining reading-rooms, the journals of the whole world, in fifty languages, are arranged, so that he who sails may read, as well as he who runs! The rays of Lloyd's all-seeing eye light up the earth from pole to pole, wherever man dares to venture, and its fiat can beggar Puck's girdle around the world to a mere slow performance.

The lightning flash of Lloyds' message follows the roll of the English drum around the earth, and its secret agents, its fast friends, its true servitors, are on every bark which proves Britannia's title to the empire of the waters on the face of the earth.

And under other flags, the honest sailor leans upon "Lloyds' List" and "Lloyds' Register of British and Foreign Shipping," to the dismay of all other mundane marine authorities. "Bureau Veritas," the "Austrian Lloyds," and all minor argus-eyed watchers "pale their ineffectual fires" before this maelstrom of power—money—men—records—and nautical science.

So grave, so austere, this self-governing body of Britons, that even the government bends to it, politicians eagerly woo its chilly regard, and the news journals kneel before the august throne of Lloyds! It is only

filled by the shadowy presence of the ideal British merchant, whose inviolable word is his sacred bond! For, here, pounds, shillings and pence are paid in righteous equity. Woe be to the erring who fight against its slow awakening wrath! There is no escape but death, or the perpetual effacement of the transported "lifer!"

If a bit of jollity ever lights up the somber shades of Lloyds, it gleams out in the "Captains' rooms," where ships are daily bartered and sold, where men for golden hire bind themselves to the issues of life and death, and where owners and masters can meet in friendship over a drop of spirits and a friendly Havana.

Here the brother returned from Plover Bay, by the icy Behring Straits, meets his cradle mate from the sweltering Red Sea,—here, the grizzled father running a Japanese merchant trader, sometimes rejoins his son, the slim cadet of the great P. and O.

Men coming back from misty Magellan hobnob with those who have braved that "Cape of Storms," so queerly named "Good Hope," and the whaler from Baffin's Bay chats here with his chum, an R. N. man, who commands the yacht of H. R. H. the Prince of Wales. A diversity of pathways,—an equality of bravery and skill,—a common, breezy bluffness,—characterise all these Mother Carey's chickens. Men who in the wild storms of an Atlantic gale have often sent up the cheery signal, "We will stand by you!" when its signal lifted the chill of death from the failing hearts

of the distressed! The heroes of peace, the brave and true.

And when the great doors clanged, and the last faltering woman had slipped away to the shades of the London docks,—far away, the cheery voice of John Higginbotham answered his butler, as the man in the blue and bluff livery said, “Gentlemen are already in the library, sir! Telegram just come, sir!”

Standing on the doorstep of his solidly splendid home, the Lloyds’ director cried, “Good! By Jove! Drage will be up in the morning!” One of the twelve annually named committeemen who handle the vast affairs of Lloyds, with power to make and unmake men and fortunes, John Higginbotham always left his outside cares at his front door.

Well on his way to the Lord Mayorship of London, he had already served on Lloyds’ Managing Committee for twenty years by an almost universal suffrage. Sound and sweet-hearted as a British oak, the old man soberly bore his budding civic honours, and gave to all even-handed justice,—to his friends the warm grip of the same honest hand which had crushed many a skulking rogue.

A member of the greatest London Livery Company, a director of the Bank of England, and a baronet in futuro!

He murmured, “Bright idea that of Van Lennep, to have the Austrian Lloyds’ agent at Brindisi wire the warning to me. I suppose that he sent a man over

there with it. That Smyrna gang is a deadly one. Poor agent Robinson reported 'drowned fishing.' Yes! But the ugly bullet hole in his back told another story! Beastly assassins! If any living man can trap them, old Enos Drage is the very chap! Fever proof, bullet proof, honest and true, he could take a liner into any port of the world without a pilot. But will he go? Can he go out at once?"

Higginbotham was now divested of all his damp envelopes, and was taking his sherry and bitters with his friends, before he finally recovered his composure.

"By Jove, he *must* go! It's only a lark for Enos, and I will make it an object. Unlimited backing—that's what the Twelve say." And the Twelve, for whom he was to do battle, were more powerful in their peaceful rule of maritime affairs, in these piping times of peace, than the haughty ermined Council who gathered the harvest of the Lion's Mouth, and ruled Venice, in Draconian cruelty, in the old days, when fair Venice, the bride of the Adriatic, ruled the very same Levant wherefrom the rosy Briton now swore to chase his shadowy foes, "Komanos and Company," an undiscovered cabal of incognito villains.

It was two hours before the cheese and crackers, and the spirits and priceless cigars, signalled the close of the great merchant's solemn daily feeding. In his jovial hospitality, the host had deliberately exhausted the motions of the gastronomic manual of arms. Nothing but the sudden disappearance of the entire Royal

family, or the flying away of the dome of St. Paul's, would have disturbed Higginbotham at his well-earned dinner.

He was a man of poise. "Now, gentlemen," the master said, briskly, "now, to business!" as he led the way to the library.

In the stately British home, this apartment, hallowed by the presence of great minds, gone on before, is sacred to all formal interviews, from marriage propositions to the opening of the will, where the greedy heirs cluster around with silent lips, hungry eyes and beating hearts.

"I am going to tell you a strange story, gentlemen," said the host. "I've heard already from the very man I want. He will be up here in the morning, from Southsea, and, if we agree on him, we can all turn the thing over for the last time to-morrow night. We have to trust to some good man, with the sole charge of a very important affair. I've sent for him, supposing that you would kindly back me up."

Both the well-dined colleagues nodded "as of course." "Who's your man?" briefly demanded Walden.

"Captain Enos Drage, Royal Navy, retired," said the chief, glaring around as if to defy the whole world's verdict.

"Fine old chap, have met him," interjected Waddingham. "No end of a cool, hardy old chap. Went out to China with Sherard Osborn, I think, in '62."

"Just so," cried Walden. "He commanded the

‘Shun Lee,’ an armed steamer, on the Yang-tse-Kiang. They tell me that he ruled the river as far as Hangkow, Taepings or no Taepings! Game old boy!”

“Well, I’m glad you both like him! He’s got a nasty bit of work cut out for him!” the host replied, as they then settled themselves cosily in the great Cordovan leather arm chairs.

“He’s going to run up against a cruel, crafty and bloody gang out there at Smyrna. You know how they killed poor Robinson, the local agent of ‘The Underwriters’ and Agency Association of London,’ out there, three years ago! Now, our man in charge there now, A. O. Van Lennep, knows that he cannot fight these bloody chaps alone. So he has secretly sent on to me for help. All of the men in the Association are also members of Lloyds’, and I am deep in the thing myself. We’ve got poor Robinson still to revenge, and my mind is made up to fight these fellows from here—but watch them, over there—by new men whom Komanos and Company don’t know. I’m told to spare no expense, but to break up every swindling scheme now going on there, and to follow them to the bitter end. To expose them first is the needed action.

“Now, Drage was a dashing midddy in the Crimean war, and he came home a lieutenant. He knows the Orient and Levant as few men do.”

“What’s up with ‘Komanos and Company?’ What’s their little game?” demanded Walden.

“Oh! for that,” briskly said the host, “nearly all the

marine decalogue. Smuggling, false cargo work, insurance frauds, barratry, a bit of sneaking piracy, and veiled assassination! All these things can easily be traced to this elusive firm of 'Komanos and Company.' No one knows the personnel."

"Can't you locate their home nest?" wrathfully cried Walden.

"Not so easy a job," said the host. "There are four of their ships and cargoes on the black list of false wrecks in the last ten years. A fellow named Émile Bouclair turns up now as the manager at Smyrna. He has the procuration of 'Komanos and Company.' They have been heard of heretofore at Alexandria, Port Said, Jaffa, Beyrout, Tripoli, Cyprus, Smyrna, Piraeus, Chio, Salonique, Rhodes, Candia, Constantinople, Trebizonde, Batoum, Odessa, and Trieste. Now, the 'Austrian Lloyds' have lately been swindled by this same daring gang, who seem also to be secretly backed by many of the Greek, Turkish and Egyptian merchants of the Levant, with the Armenians of all grades, some Jewish confederates, and, what is worse, they have a great hold upon all the Turkish authorities of every port where the red flag shows its white crescent. You know what Turkish officials are after?" he grinned.

"Backsheesh, I suppose!" growled Waddingham. "The man who goes out there surely takes his life in his hand. Your old dreadnaught, Enos Drage, would seem to be just the right man. What is the specific affair on the tapis, now? Some new swindle?"

"All I know is, that a giant fraud is under way. That I must at once come to the rescue of our eastern interests, and that I am to be given *carte blanche*. There must be no long chain of correspondence to betray us. Of course Her Majesty's ministers, consuls, and naval commanders in the Mediterranean and Levant will give the agent whom I send out all the secret assistance in their power."

Higginbotham drained his steaming toddy and said, "There you are! You can now see as far into the grindstone as I can!"

The juniors gazed at each other. "Look here!" said Walden. "You are really the very man to direct the whole affair. Your skipper will be up to-morrow. Go over the whole thing with him. We will all meet here to-morrow night and then hear your final orders. We both know that they only named three men, so that our signatures on these secret disbursements would save your estate any trouble in case of any accident. Of course one of us will always be on hand here in London to answer the secret agent's call."

"So go on and engage this Captain Drage, if you can get him. We will ratify all you do. You can telegraph to-morrow in the 'Anglo-Indian's' own cipher, to inform the anxious Van Lennep. Say, 'Inspector coming!' He will then post your man thoroughly on his arrival. We will know of all your plans, observe your progress, and we can aid you here, so Lloyds' interests

will be safe. Go in, governor, and cut out the whole cloth as you will."

Higginbotham was secretly pleased at the unanimity of his junior advisers.

"Then, as you say so, I'll go ahead to-morrow morning with old Enos!"

The two friends went out and braved the gusty storms of the streets, where the feeble yellow gaslight wildly flared in the tempest.

Only vice, crime or misery was abroad on London streets,—the ragged homeless crowded in dripping area-way and gusty alley,—and yet the pleasure seekers of society gaily breasted the storm in their splendid equipages, glad to escape the deathly chill of the languorous British home.

Long after the juniors had "shunted their moral responsibilities" off on to the broad shoulders of their host, the old man sat there, alone, gazing into his fire.

He saw there visions of derelict boats, storm-driven, of rich cargoes foully submerged by villain sailors, of missing ships masquerading in the antipodes, under changed colour, rig, private marks, with false papers and stolen names. All the dangers which attack the insured hull and cargo hovered around the old underwriter as a financial nightmare.

"I wonder," he said, as he rang for his butler to bring his bedroom candle and "night-cap," "I wonder if 'Komanos and Company' can match that Yankee skipper whom we nailed out in Australia! That gay

mariner ran away with the ship and stole three cargoes. He changed her rig four times, illegally used the Guatemalan, Hawaiian, and Japanese flag, borrowed money twice on 'bottomry bond,' unblushingly sold hull and cargo at Melbourne, pouched his money, and was only given away at last, by a little lark with a woman."

The old man slowly stumped off to bed. "The Yankee only robbed," he muttered as he climbed the stairs, "but 'Komanos and Company' have always left a bloody trail. Thugs as well as thieves!" and vainly his wandering thoughts that night tried to resolve the mystery always clinging to the smooth-faced Frenchman, Émile Bouclair, whose luxurious apartments were the scene, this very night, of a gay little supper, *à deux*, in the Grand Hotel Huck at Smyrna.

For the battle of wits was on, and "Komanos and Company" were gleeful.

London was just a bit less disagreeable when John Higginbotham descended the next morning into the cosy breakfast room. In the absence of his family at their Kentish country seat, the table was set for two only.

There was nothing unusual in the snowy cloth, the brightest of all silver services, variously and hideously hall marked, the toast racks, egg cups, marmalade jars, and all the paraphernalia of that English breakfast which is a part of the unwritten Constitution. The great Persian cat blinked at the red Irish setter, affectionately following the master in.

The vast house was silent save for the flitting about of the neat house maids and the solemn tread of the grave-faced servants. Huge silent drawing-rooms were piled with all the barbaric spoil of either Ind, the past tribute of grateful captains. An indefinable odour of Canton, a waft of Cairo, a fragrance of Borneo spices, and South Sea incense groves, still clung to the sober atmosphere of the Briton's home.

As Higginbotham entered, a brisk voice challenged him from behind a particularly damp copy of the "Times."

"Hello, old chap, what's up?" cried the visitor.

As the paper was tossed on a lounge, the alert form of Captain Enos Drage, R. N., displayed his well-cut tweeds, and he nodded, in answer to the underwriter's cheery morning greeting.

The men were seated at table before the captain's eager curiosity was satisfied. The naval man's spare form was still of athletic mould, his high domed pointed head yet bore a fair wreath of brown hair, and a struggling whisker covered his heavy-boned jaws. There was the very snap of steel springs in his firm white fingers. The broad shining forehead was lit up with the wonderful frosty gray blue eyes, which could flash on occasion with the glint of steel. The wholesome tan of forty years at sea hid all the evidences of Enos Drage's sixty-eight years. In the hallway reposed his mackintosh, stout umbrella and horse-hide travelling-bag, which were old campaigners of distinction. And

the north countryman's motto, "Ready, aye, ready!" seemed to be expressed in the lines of the firm lips surmounting his carven chin.

When Captain Enos Drage, R. N., sported the uniform of his rank, the Sebastopol medal on his breast vied in honour there with the Burmese, Chinese, India mutiny, and the easily won Egyptian. When Enos Drage heard the echoes of the eighty-ton guns die away at Alexandria, he at last hung up his well-notched cutlass with a grim satisfaction.

On this particular morning it ornamented the wall of his library at St. Aubrey's Villa, Lenox Road, South-sea. "Old Salamander," fondly so-called, bore the marks of bullet, Ashantee knife, and Burmese spear, and yet, sound in hull and rigging, he bowsed along over life's uncertain sea, saved by his hard head, and guided by a nose which would have delighted that great Corsican, who once cried, "Give me men with plenty of nose."

Crunching his toast, swallowing his soda, and sipping his dish of tea, Enos Drage held his wondering soul in well disciplined check.

But, when his bit of fish and eggs had vanished, he said, "What's up, John? Another sunken steamer to raise? Another fly-away Yankee to lariat? Any more fishing for a couple of thousand tons of water pipes in the frozen Gulf of Finland? You never want me unless you are in trouble!"

Higginbotham's face grew grave. "Come in here,

Enos!" he said, leading the way to the library. They threaded the solemn splendours of the main hall. Drage lit his manila when the host had stuffed his pipe.

"Enos, I never knew you to go back on anything," he began.

"Only the Chinese stink-pots," cautiously hedged the naval captain.

The underwriter laughed at the one timidity of a man who had faced the cross-fire of a hundred and fifty sixty-four pounders, at Sebastopol, in a cockboat of a naval tug, leading Her Majesty's fleet into action. "All right, I admit the stink-pots, but, nothing else!"

Drage's steady eyes glared in a mute assent.

"Somebody has got to go out to Smyrna and face a gang of infernal cut-throats and swindlers! They're a beastly lot, this 'Komanos and Company!' Can you go out there?"

"When?" sharply said Drage.

"Right away!" sententiously cried the host.

"On one condition," rasped out Drage, with the bark of a playful wolf.

"And that is?" interrupted Higginbotham.

"That I deal with no one but you, and that I have my own way in all things!" the veteran calmly replied.

"Oh! come now!" soberly said the host. "Lloyds has given me a good secret committee—Walden and Waddingham are the other two. They will come up here to-night. Of course you'll have your own way. It's a stiff bit of work!"

"How long will it take?" queried the captain.

"Say six months to a year. I have *carte blanche* as to money. You shall have your own terms—fix your own fees, and all that. Only these two men must know of your mission. It is a profound secret to all but the Executive Committee of Lloyds.

"Now, that's something like it. I don't care to be hampered by every old busybody who has a thousand pounds to stick on a policy," grinned Captain Drage, showing a double row of splendid white teeth.

"Tell me the main pointers. I must have time to think it all over."

In half an hour, Captain Enos raised his head. "Can I have all your confidential inspection reports sent up to your own room for me to study this thing over?" he demanded.

"Anything you want in the world. But I must telegraph to Smyrna this morning. Now, what's your answer?"

Higginbotham was studying the face of the sturdy old man, now as stern as any stone idol.

"They're a bad lot out there, these Levantines. I know the gang," growled Enos. "Well, give me a week to get ready, with full power. I'll go out. I will send a man off there to-morrow night to prospect. You send your telegram along now. Yes, I'll go!"

"By Jove! I'm awfully relieved, Enos!" cried the host. "Will you go down in my carriage?"

"Go ahead and send your telegrams! Get the

papers out! I'll send a couple of dispatches down to Southsea, and then follow you down in a hansom."

The two men clasped hands silently after the fashion of Englishmen, and Enos Drage was now bound for good, to "John Company."

When the captain's second manila was finished, John Higginbotham was half-way down to where the black dome of St. Paul's hung with its whitened projections over the congested amphitheatre where London's millions turn over hundreds of millions in gold, under the shadows of the grim Tower, rising, there by the leaden river, with its forests of masts, its gloomy warehouse crypts, and its interminable docks.

Drage had thought it all over quietly. "Yes, I'll go out to Malta, and first send the boy on there. Old Jack may come in also to lend a hand."

Rapidly penning a telegram, he called the butler. "Send that right off, Soames. There's a good fellow. The shilling is for Her Majesty. You can keep the half crown for yourself."

And the delighted butler carefully spelled out these words, as he hastened away to the postoffice:

"HOWARD VINTON,

"St. Aubrey's Villa, Lenox Road, Southsea:

"Get ready to start for Smyrna at once. Find Jack Masterson. Down to-morrow night. DRAGE."

The old captain chuckled as he carefully wound up his pocket chronometer. "That will find him, surely.

He's always hanging around the house with Lily. I wonder will he want to go? He's a good lad!"

Before Captain Drage had covered a dozen blocks in his hansom, he reflected that everyone around him always did exactly what he told them to, and so the unconscious old tyrant smiled as he was trundled along.

"Of course the boy will go! He's a game lad, and old Jack can watch over him a bit."

He became pensive, as he for a moment reflected upon the consternation which this summons would cause in the gentle breast of blue-eyed, golden-haired Lily Arnot.

"I can make it all up to them—later!" he mused, as he jogged along, to busy himself the livelong day in the study of the mass of papers now awaiting him at Lloyds.

There were four men gathered that evening in the library at Higginbotham's when Enos Drage gave his views upon the quest in hand.

"With your unlimited credentials I shall have all the power I want, gentlemen," remarked Enos, "and so I will not trouble the 'Austrian Lloyds' at Trieste, unless I need to use their wires, ciphers and perhaps their help in some juncture. You see, cute old Baron Bruck founded that very concern in 1833, to draw all the Eastern Mediterranean commerce into Austrian hands at Trieste. Their apparent friendship is only a real hostility to us, and even the 'Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco' works openly against us. Their three sec-

tions—insurance, steamship, and scientific—are all opposed to British interests. Their subsidiary journals are inimical to us also. Now, as to pure insurance interests, their men, near at hand, naturally choose the best risks, and then push the doubtful ones on us, as they are far nearer the field. If 'Komanos and Company' have really some power with the Turkish officials, they can favour the Austrian Lloyds, and so gain their quiescent neutrality.

"Now, I see from my study of to-day, that 'The Underwriters' Association of London' has been always mulcted in three times the sum paid by the Greek company, 'La Nationale,' of Athens, and the 'Riuone Adriatica,' of Trieste. All these people have agencies at Smyrna. There 'Komanos' policies have been in the first instance taken out by Greek, Turkish, Austrian and Levantine merchants, as well as some smaller French and German houses.

"The risks of the other foreign companies have been very safe, while you have been steadily heavy losers, and all the policies finally seem to wind up in the hands of 'Komanos and Company.' This proves that they are all in a hidden bond of friendship, and pull in the profits to themselves, pushing all the losses your way! Now, this buying of an enormous old tramp steamer at Trieste, patching her up for a voyage, and borrowing money on a bottomry bond on her, shows that they are getting ready for a big stroke. I'll have this young American out there before the ship is at Smyrna, and

Jack Masterson, my old engineer on the 'Shun Lee,' and see her whole machinery, before the load is aboard."

"I'm a bit shy of Americans," said Walden, doubtfully.

Drage laughed heartily. "He's all right, this chap! I met him at the bombardment of Alexandria. He has a good bit of money of his own, and he went up to Cairo with the troops of the Tel el Kébir campaign.

"He knew Forbes, and McGahan, and Baker, Burnaby, and all these chaps. He's been around the Isle of Wight this season watching the Vigilant and the Britannia races. He knows the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Danube, and can easily play off the 'New York Herald correspondent.' Nobody will dare to touch him. There's the Armenian troubles, you know. And so he's got to dig into the citadel of this chap Émile Bouclair, while Jack Masterson watches the doubtful boat. Besides, Howard Vinton has a growing 'English interest' down at Southsea, which I will unmask at the right time. So you can get my credentials all ready. This dispatch to-day about the purchase of the big ship at Trieste shows there is no time to lose. We must be quickly on the ground. We must let them get their winning hand ready, but they must play it under our eyes."

"That's so!" growled Higginbotham, "and then go in and break them up! Chase them to the North Pole, but show them up. If any Turkish officials are in the frauds, we will have Her Majesty's Government behind us."

In half an hour the last secret instructions were given and received, and the quartette all adjourned to the supper-room.

"Remember," said the two juniors, "we only stand behind Higginbotham. All your reports and business goes to him direct. When do you leave?"

"As soon as I have started my men, I'll come back and then take the first steamer to Malta. You can get your letters to the consul at Smyrna and to Van Lennep ready. Full power, you know. Also, the secret letter to the British ambassador at Constantinople. For I'll only trust to the Union Jack! I'm off for home in the first morning train."

It was only after urging, when the punch had loosened all the listeners' tongues, that Enos Drage told them the story of his Chinese wanderings under Gordon and Sherard Osborn.

The old captain sat with his cheroot poised, and his Harvey's club soda before him, as he oracularly remarked: "All these Orientals, Asiatics and Levantines are the same—alike, cold, cruel, tricky, and bloodthirsty! Even the Japanese politeness is but a veneer—wait till the 'little brown man' shows his true colours in the next great war! All of them will bear watching to-day just as well as in the time when Ward, Burgevine and Gordon fought the bloody Taepings.

"I don't fancy that 'Komanos and Company' can get around me, after my watchful days on the 'Shun Lee'! The years from 'sixty-two' to 'sixty-four' taught

me what all the dark-skinned races are. I learned an early lesson in the India mutiny. I saw later the horrors of Soochow, and I had the delightful pleasure of shelling the unfaithful Chinese at Hankow, in 'sixty-six.' I give no faith or credence to any of them—these dark-skinned scoundrels—after seeing my brother Zachary wager his life upon it and lose!

"Now, when I face 'Komanos and Company' I face them with the eye of a man who trusts no dark-skinned blood.

"Poor Zachary!" sighed old Captain Drage. "He had escaped the Nanking massacre, been wounded and broken down in our interminable fights on the Yellow River and the Yang-tse-Kiang. I wanted him to go home to his wife and his only daughter at Portsmouth, or else to stay with me on the 'Shun Lee.'"

"For, I had a splendid steamer, with powerful engines, and a fine mixed crew of Lascars, Manila men, faithful Chinese, and eleven dare-devil Europeans as under officers. We had two hundred stand of the best Enfields, with revolvers and good tomahawks, and she carried a battery of twelve splendid brass guns, with a good four-inch rifle at bow and stern. For junk attacks and stink-pot work, we always had our boiling water-hoses ready, four in all.

"Now, when I came in to Shanghai, after clearing the river, to refit with ammunition and unload a cargo of wounded men and refugees, I learned that poor

Zachary had been sent off on a secret quest to remove a half million dollars in silver bars which had been buried some time before by the Mandarins in an old ruined temple near the head of Hanchow Bay. He had taken the fastest lorcha in Shanghai, and forty Chinese men, picked out by the compradores of the richest firms.

"Poor Zachary! He was always a dare-devil, and so, he trusted to the faithful Chinese. Four tried and true Europeans were with him.

"I was sorely wounded by a copper gingal ball, and yet, when I found that the lorcha 'Emerald' had been missing for three weeks, I obtained permission to go out, and I coasted slowly down, examining every bay and headland as far as the location where the treasure had been concealed. A Mandarin who knew the spot accompanied us.

"My heart sank, when on landing a boat party, we found that the enormous hidden deposit had been carefully removed. Two hundred and fifty huge bars of two thousand dollars each, in all.

"And then the oily Mandarin raised his eyebrows to me and sneeringly asked, 'Where is your brother?' I could have killed him, but I only put the ship about in search, taking a wider range out to sea.

"At the dawn of the first day, on our way back, an old Scotch quartermaster roused me, crying out: 'Abandoned lorcha ahead, sir, drifting, a league away.'

"I was on my feet in a moment, and soon three

armed boats, with forty stanch men, were eagerly pulling for the drifting lorcha.

"I kept the 'Shun Lee' standing on at half speed, with all the brass guns manned and ready for action.

"My first lieutenant soon came pulling back to the steamer in his barge, and led me down into the cabin. 'Captain,' said he, as his teeth chattered, 'I don't dare to tell you! Don't you go on board! They're all there. Dead! The five white men! Those yellow devils have turned on them! The lorcha is gutted! The rigging is useless! She has probably drifted down past Great Saddle Island!'

"I had no useless tears then for my dead brother, for I saw through the whole plot! The treacherous scoundrels had tried to make it appear to be the work of pirates, and the stolen half million was hidden somewhere. The price of my dead brother's honour. Why had they not scuttled or burned the lorcha?

"I seemed to hear Zachary's voice whispering and crying for vengeance.

"'Take the vessel's command!' said I. 'Run up and get a tow line out! Let all the dead be decently disposed. The carpenter has plenty of camphor wood chests.'

"'How far off is this same island?' 'Dead ahead, and just visible,' said my First. 'Stand off and on then till 4 o'clock,' I cried, 'and we will run in there at day-break, and search the island! Let not a single light be shown!'

Old Enos Drage rose and eagerly paced the floor.

"By 4 o'clock I was roused up by my first officer. 'All ready, sir. I've now got some sails and a half dozen men aboard of her! The men are all having their breakfast.'

"'Full speed then for the island!' I cried. 'We'll land one hundred men and five boats. Take forty musket rounds, with revolvers and cutlasses!' The day was just breaking as we swiftly ran into the little cove, under the sink of the saddle of the two hills.

"The surgeon and second engineer were left on the 'Shun Lee,' with her remaining men at the double-shotted brass guns, and we descended upon the nest. Not a sound but the splash of the oars was heard as our boats swept into the cove. I was the first man to leap ashore!

"The boats were quickly moored under cover of the ship's guns, with two men left in each. And then our double skirmish line swept up the island. Not a living thing was found in the pepper scrub and low bushes save a few wild hogs. It was near noon when, suddenly, Jack Masterson grasped my arm.

"'D——n my eyes! There's smoke coming out of that hill top!' Sure enough! There was a dim column of blue smoke filtering out from the broken rocks. 'We've got 'em, Cap'n!' said Jack, his eyes ablaze. 'There's a cave there!'

"In half an hour we found the hidden entrance. But, only one man could crawl in at a time!

"While the men were running around hunting for dry grass, and a double firing party was being told off to flank the entrance, Jack was away like a flash to the 'Shun Lee' in the cutter. He cried on his return, 'They've barricaded the entrance well! Here are a half dozen stink pots.'

"And then, one by one, they were lit and thrown far into the narrow opening. With cocked Enfields my eager men now waited!

"There was the sound of smothered cries at last, and then, the barricade was burst by a crazed mob. Knife and spear in hand, the half-suffocated pirate brutes came dashing out. The ring of the Enfields, the thud of the bayonet and the revolver crack was their only welcome.

"At night, forty-eight pigtails lay there stark and stiff in a line. There were the 'faithful ones' who had turned!

"It took us a whole day to clean the cave of the stink pots' poisonous gases. And then we found, besides, five Chinese smothered inside the cave and the whole of the stolen treasure. I wondered at finding all of poor Zachary's clothes and arms, as well as all the effects of the others. They must have been all drugged and killed while they slept.

"When I got back to Shanghai my first was in command, and I was in the hospital four months with a brain fever.

"It was a chattering fool who told me that my

poor brother Zach and his four petty officers were all found spiked down naked to the deck, with their throats cut!

"The same ship that took his poor body home to rest in English soil carried a bill of exchange for twenty thousand pounds. The hypocritical Mandarins gave me that for saving the treasure. They paid another fifth, as salvage to the crew of the 'Shun Lee.'

"And that very fund—the price of poor Zach's blood—is now all that his grandchild has! For, when Major Arnot and his wife died of cholera out in India, poor Zach's daughter could only turn to this old hulk to watch over their infant Lily. If 'Komanos and Company' can fool a man who has spent a dozen years tussling with these Chinese pirates and the sly Malay rogues, they will have to keep their weather eye out."

And so, when the old mariner waved his bed candle in a "good night," the three underwriters nodded to each other.

"Old 'Shun Lee' Drage will be the very man. His bronzed old figurehead shows the sailor every inch!"

"Yes, and he has the nose of a ferret. Peculiar old chap. Undaunted, untiring, and as cool as an iceberg. Let us give him a free hand, for we now send him to fight an unknown enemy in a faraway land, and at their own chosen game."

So saying, John Higginbotham toasted the vanished mariner, who was himself a stern teetotaler, a nautical wonder.

And then the other members of the secret committee of Lloyds sought their homes in a profound confidence in their weather-beaten old champion.

CHAPTER II.

THE LILY OF SOUTHSEA.

THE secret committee were all happy men as they entered the Royal Exchange next morning, under the shadows of the eight great columns. They had shuffled off their annoying burden upon the shoulders of grim old "Shun Lee" Drage!

The two juniors, in some indefinable way, felt that sturdy John Higginbotham and the battered old Captain, would finally do up Komanos and Company "to the queen's taste!"

"It's all right now," said Walden to Waddingham. "Uncle John has telegraphed to Van Lennep, and there is Maurice Fitzgerald, our Vice Consul General at Smyrna, a splendid fellow! There's always two or three war vessels of the Christian nations kept within hail by the secret pact! And old 'Shun Lee' has his seven league boots on now!" They passed on to their daily mingling with the swarm of human ants rolling over the nimble British Sovereign, whose golden face never grows old!

It was true that the veteran who had served his

ringing brass shell guns under the Dragon flag, was already bowling back to Southsea.

Comfortably ensconced, "en second" he pulled away at his manila, and with his domed head cocked awry, pondered upon the "near future." He knew that the old mackintosh and umbrella—his plenary authority from Lloyds—and his well-stored cranium were all ready for the voyage! Higginbotham's last word to report to Lloyds' agent at Portsmouth for any later news and for cipher communication put his mind at ease.

"I'll just consign Howard Vinton and Jack Masterson to Van Lennep, at Smyrna," he mused, as the train slid easily along down through Surrey and Hampshire, to the green Solent.

"They must be off to-night and run through the whole trip without a stop! Vinton can take the Oriental Express,—see our Minister at Constantinople,—and then round up at the 'Grand Hotel Huck.' Jack Masterson can run direct down to Trieste,—catch an Austrian Lloyds' steamer,—and show up at the 'Scots Arms,' with mine host 'Sandy McPherson' at Smyrna! He will find out all about this big tramp steamer picked up by these sharpers! If he's the Jack I've always found him, he'll get into her engine room or stoke hole, and then pipe the enemy off. Yes; all will go smoothly. But I must get the boy off to-night. I'll warrant he's at the house now, waiting for me!"

In which sage conclusion, Captain Enos Drage was only partly correct. The storm which had howled over

Middlesex had driven Mr. Howard Vinton into the very cosiest home in Hampshire, but the nervous, impulsive American was not waiting for "Uncle Enos!"

He was only studying a little colour effect,—the peachy bloom of Lily Arnot's cheek,—the sparkling blue of her frank eyes,—and the twisted gold of her silken hair. That gold which shines only as Nature's dowry of the English maid, *par excellence*.

The wild wind was tumbling the green billows around in the Solent and a line of England's huge battleships sullenly swung at Spithead, their black sides gleaming out in England's defiant challenge to her sleepless foes.

Storm signals were flying in Spithead harbour and the chilly winds shrilled from the hostile shores of France!

But, in Howard Vinton's warm lover heart, the "blue peter" signal of departure was already hoisted, and his thoughts were as wistfully tender as the dashing Tommy Atkins when "The girl I left behind me" rings out!

"Paraded for foreign service, that's the tip!" mused Vinton, as he awaited the very neatest of maids, whose mute signal brought Miss Lily Arnot to her coign of vantage behind the tea urn!

Sacred privilege of the holy British matron! Lineal glory of the family line! The manipulation of the very pride of the British home, the gleaming silver tea urn! For, none but those "to the manner born" may usurp

the function of the acknowledged woman who rules the household under cover of that sacred implement.

A Spanish woman's fan,—a French woman's expressive eyes,—an Austrian's witching smile,—an Italian's inimitable grace of gesture,—the German Fräulein's sigh, aid their empire,—the American girl's facile repartee conquers all,—but, behind the awful tea urn, the English woman defies a social world in arms, and then annihilates her foes with her "baby stare"!

"It all seems so strange, Howard!" said Miss Lily. "I was looking forward to our rides,—our lawn tennis,—the Royal Yacht Squadron races,—and presto!—both you and Uncle Enos are off like a shot for Smyrna!"

And then the shadow of gloom settled over Vinton's bright face. It was a friendly waft of the Recording Angel's wing that smothered the rebellious ejaculation: "Oh! D—n Smyrna!"

The very sweetest girl in Southsea had called up all the delights of the coming summer! "I don't know what bee is buzzing in Uncle Enos' bonnet!" the young American sadly murmured. "He is free to come and go! He has a road passport in perpetuity, one of the 'Kinder der Welt'! But—Smyrna is beastly hot in summer! Even tough old Jack Masterson, who laughs at the Red Sea, doesn't relish this trip! Is he here?"

There was a faint blush on Lily Arnot's fair cheek, as she laughed. "He is downstairs saying Good Bye to Mary already! He is a bit downhearted, but he will go all the same! He knows that Uncle Enos' will is law!"

"Do you think so, Lily?" said the "correspondent."

"You must remember, Howard, Captain Drage has been all the parent I have ever known!" A bit of very tender interlude was here cut short by the entrance of Miss Lavinia Drage.

This Spartan spinster greeted Howard Vinton with a smile of intelligent neutrality, and then coldly allowed her grand-niece to peck at her withered cheek with a duty kiss.

The days of backboard and Magnall's questions,—the era of "L. E. L." and "the Passion Flower Annual," were wafted back by the advent of this stern gentlewoman.

Around the walls of the room were hung several neat bits of water colour, the trophies of her salad days.

And now, Miss Lavinia gazed with a sigh at those tell-tale initials on the bristol board "L. D. 1845."—"As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form," she defied the ravages of Time like the Coliseum,—her maiden zone still unbound,—confined her still slender shape!

No one had dared to trifle with the records of her age, and the astute single lady guarded in secret the Family Bible with a Draconian severity. But she always called the aging Enos Drage her junior, and she still fondly regarded the wedge-headed old veteran as a truant sailor boy!

She had never seemed to notice the narrow silver fringe upon his gleaming crimson occiput growing thinner with every year!

In all the past summer Miss Lavinia had alertly watched the young American! His literary trips to London,—his dashes to the Continent,—his runs to Newmarket,—his following of yacht fleet and current notable events,—had all ended in a final return to Southsea!

“Sunny Southsea,” so fondly termed by the local inhabitants who laughed to scorn the elusive charms of Penzance and the feeble glories of St. Heliers!

Here, in the heart of a people devoted to the Crown, the last maiden flower of the Drages had slowly budded, bloomed, and was now withering in the sere and yellow! She had never focused her indomitable gaze upon “the tyrant man!”

There was a dim tradition that when Lieutenant Rodgers Conyers of H. M. S. “Eurydice” was speared in Burmah in 1854, a long silken lock of her bright hair was buried in the trench with that same gallant officer!

Be it as it may,—her gentle reserve was unbroken, and the fragrant memory of the gallant Conyers lingered in the emptiness of her sealed heart’s chamber, like the perfume of attar of roses, clinging to the gilded crystal, cast away for many a year!

A walking directory of the Army and Navy List, an authority upon the Civil Service, and a scrupulous observer of ceremonial social forms was Miss Lavinia!

The whole region seemed to be consecrated to the Sovereign, and the meteor flag of England had always

“burned terrific” before her eyes on trim frigate, snaky torpedo boat, pirate-looking cruiser and lumbering battleship!

The squatty mail-clad revolving forts,—the antique masonry works,—the ugly new mud batteries,—and the vast barracks, all were dedicated to the Army or Navy!

And in the society of Admirals,—Commodores,—Generals and Colonels, dashing Adjutants and even trim “middies,” Miss Lavinia became an authority upon all fleet and garrison matters! In good works she was conspicuous, and the gentle tribute of her guinea flowed into the coffers of every “society” which extracts stray sovereigns from a people who always give liberally, heartily and quietly. Miss Lavinia conscientiously read the Court Circular, and she enjoyed the distant glimpse of the Royal Ensign waving over Osborne House!

She knew every sounding of the Solent and Southampton water; she could have walked blindfolded from St. Helens and Ryde to Cowes,—Yarmouth,—Brixton, and Bambridge!

The roses had bloomed and withered many a year since she had exhausted the attractions of the twenty-one days’ trips from Southsea! A rare old girl of a golden heart!

Her whole family had been devoted to the service of the Crown,—the Army and Navy. India and the Colonies had eaten up the “fighting Drages,” who could not bear to live at home in peace in the snug little island!

The women had all married in the same spirit, and so the "service" blood had been bred, in and in!—So Miss Lavinia felt that she, too, was serving the flag in her silent faithfulness to the memory of the man dead out there in Burmah, whose proud simple epitaph was "Killed in action,"—the mute record of the willing payment with his heart's blood of the Queen's Shilling!

It had been the same when the rash Zachary Drage had been so foully done to death in China, for he was "on leave," with Sherard Osborn's men, when he died on the lorch "Emerald"! When Enos Drage returned at last to hang up his dented sword at Southsea, he, too, was received with open arms for his battered shape,—his scapes and scars attested the olden Drage loyalty!

There was a softening in the adamant heart of the spinster when young Major Henry Arnot and his girl-wife, Mary Drage, died together of cholera at Allahabad in "seventy-seven"! Zachary Drage's sweet girl-wife had not lived to enjoy long the income of the grateful mandarins' present!

Mary Drage had been only too happy in her love dream with dashing Harry Arnot, who had boldly galloped a light battery through the Sepoy's flaming ranks as a Lieutenant in mutiny days! The dark-skinned Amma, who brought white-faced baby Lily Arnot home, wondered at the austere face of the bony "Mem Sahib."

But, the docile Hindoo understood the meaning of

the opened arms that clasped Mary Arnot's baby to a childless breast!

The two women got on well together, though speech was denied them, for unselfish love has a language all its own! And long after the fragile Amma had duly succumbed to the fogs and chills of "Sunny Southsea," even in these days of Harold Vinton,—the little voyager from India had remained "The Child!"

Miss Lavinia, who scorned the weakness of eye-glasses,—gazed on this particular morning at "The Child" with a woman's intuition that something was going to happen! For, "The Child" had a decided efflorescence of blue true-lover's knot at her neck,—a "brighter iris" than usual glowed upon her damask cheek, and the slender fingers trembled over the egg-shell china cups!

"They have been talking it over!" grimly decided Miss Lavinia. She was not averse to the society of Howard Vinton, but he was a "Yankee" from that shadowy realm—"the States,"—by which name Englishmen define our own Columbia!

"I must speak to Enos! This must not go on too far!" mused Miss Lavinia, turning her calm blue eyes upon the audacious stranger whose errant footsteps always returned to the immediate vicinity of "The Child."

But, the dark-haired young American was soberly gazing at that trinity of old swords on the wall,—the cutlasses of the dead Zachary, the blade of the much

alive Enos, and the artillery sabre of the late Major Henry Arnot, V. C.

"Have you heard from your uncle, Lily?" said the courteous chaperon.

"Yes, Auntie," the demure maiden replied. "Uncle Enos will be here at midday! Mr. Vinton and old Jack, too, are waiting for him. They are all going away to-night,—to Smyrna!"

The girl's voice ended in a shadowy sob, and yet she bravely gulped her dish of tea, after the fashion of the Drages!

"Ah!" significantly said the spinster. She knew of these mysterious quests which led Enos Drage around the world! His restless spirit still yearned for action! Wherever a castaway ship called for its salvage, or a sunken cargo awaited the energetic reclaimer,—where financial broil,—knotty problem,—or tangled insurance affairs, demanded a cool head and honest heart,—Enos Drage was sent out as the very man to fill the gap!

An expert upon values,—a marvellously patient adjuster,—a fearless advocate,—the old retired officer was the secret servant of the Lloyds! And, as Miss Lavinia religiously hoarded up the excess of her private income for "The child,"—so old Enos Drage merrily worked to the end that his "personal estate" might be noted in "The Times," and later, fence the lamb of his heart from the cold winds of adversity!

"Some business trip,—as usual," remarked Miss

Lavinia. "I will now go out for my constitutional so as to be here and help Enos with his packing!"

The old lady marched away, with a shrewd glance in the direction of Howard Vinton. The young man had risen, and was studying the collection of hideous bronzes, — carven tusks, — Benares brass, — Japanese crystal, nautilus shells, — heroically useless cabinets, all the aftermath of the many service voyages of the wandering Drages!

In the substantial four-storey stone Southsea mansion there was an unrivaled collection of armour, — swords and daggers, — Turkish gear, — Southsea curios, — quaint broideries — and a very practically selected "loot," which spoke of "mutiny days," as well as the deeds of the "Ever Victorious Army" and "Her Majesty's Forces" in China.

Captain Enos Drage had been for long years vainly besieged by the experts of Wardour street to market these accumulated treasures. The sly old sailor knew of their increasing value!

He loved to pore over them with memories of the days when under the fire of gingals, — and facing spear and musket, — these trophies had fallen to the share of a fighting family! Even that vigorous Hebrew "Zacharias of Southsea," failed to gather in these treasures to swell his collection upon the marine parade!

The "severe simplicity" of Miss Lavinia's departure told the young American rover that there was no time to lose! He knew that the spinster was faintly agnostic

as to all American character! She regarded the American girls who were now bowling down both Duke and Earl as mere piratical interlopers! Fair to view—and hollow at heart!

She had keenly watched Howard Vinton all the past summer! And, scan him never so critically, he had not made the expected “break!” His twenty-eight years had given his tall form a well-knit strength,—his sun-burned face showed open manly features, a sweeping trooper’s mustache,—a good square chin, and his steady dark eyes were cordial and frank in their glances!

A world wanderer,—a lettered Harvard man,—his name was already known in review and magazine in the columns of great journals and the lighter “lurid covers!” His family had not been “sold to slavery in America,”—there were yet some English Vintons, and he had a neat bit of property! A mighty sportsman and yachtsman, he had been gladly welcomed at the “United Service” at Portsmouth and the Cowes Yacht Club!

His “nasal twang” was no more “en evidence” than “potatoes galore” are in modern Ireland, and he had not forged a Bill of Exchange on Coutt’s Bank,—he had raised up no Fenian Army,—he had not “flourished a revolver” and shot out every gas light at the club dinners, *à la* “Buffalo Bill’s Last Supper!”

He did not fleece unsuspecting nobles at leviathan poker bets,—and he did not tell “unvarnished tales” of apocryphal veracity, to confound the homekeeping Briton.

He was therefore voted a "very proper sort of fellow" by the officers of the Connaught Rangers,—the Royal Artillery,—the Worcester Regiment,—and on H. M. steamers "Terrible," "Thunderer," and "Dreadnaught!" The mess agreed that he could "hand, reef and steer," and put away no more than his fair share of "navy sherry."

The winter had passed on quietly and the "dreaded American outbreak" had not yet occurred! Captain Enos Drage was not of a marrying family,—he was as unsentimental as a druidical stone! He had never "capered nimbly to the lascivious pleatings of the lute," for the various services which he had adorned had kept him far too busy to fall into the outstretched and yearning arms of lovely women!

Enos Drage had long been familiar with "the States," the "terra incognita" of the Briton, and he had even looked up Mr. Vinton's standing at home. The young man was rated "A1—***— for twenty-one years at Lloyds," on the skipper's mental register!

And as he really had learned to admire and trust the bright self-possessed young fellow, he had allowed him to glide into the tranquil harbour of St. Aubrey's Villa unchallenged!

Enos Drage still worshipped the mental picture of his niece Mary, who had gone happily away to India with the gallant Arnot!

And the silent flight of years never warned him that "The Child" was now the glowing image of her mother,

—living, loving, and ready to be loved again! It was only the argus-eyed Miss Lavinia who “kept the cases” on Love’s young dream! And hence, the spinster was resolved this very morning to “speak to Enos” upon his return!

A shadowy misgiving to this effect agitated Howard Vinton, whose Napoleonic ideas of love led him to make the first attack.

And so, when the forms of Miss Lavinia and her attendant maid had disappeared, Howard Vinton turned and said: “Lily! Come up to the drawing room! I must speak to you before Captain Drage returns! I feel that this is no ordinary venture which takes us both so far away! He will be here soon, and before I say ‘yes or no’ to him—I wish to speak to you!”

The young man was kept waiting in the stately second-floor rooms for some time!

The beautiful girl was still seated at the bay window below, thinking over all the dear days of the past summer, all the stolen interviews at rout and garrison ball, —at the play,—the suppers,—the *musicales* of the happy winter. It was not in the calm lethargy of the four o’clock teas that she had been drawn to her unacknowledged lover!

They had together threaded every nook of Portsea, — Landport, — Southsea, — Gosport, — Forton, — Alverstoke, and Brockhurst! Captain Drage,—a tireless walker,—always raced ahead with a slim curate, once a

stroke oar, and so, left the two strangely met friends to wander on in a leisurely after-chase!

On yacht and launch they had weathered together every headland of the Isle of Wight,—the young fellow often thrilled with the glance of her laughing eyes as the salt spray showered her golden locks! Long days at Portsdown Hill,—the shades of Netley Abbey,—merry jaunts to Carisbrooke Castle,—to the faded glories of Wolsey's palace now came back!

They had sat among the yellowing gorse above the Needles,—they had wandered under the dim religious light of Arundel Cathedral! They had wondered at the beautiful interior of Petworth House,—and fed the slim deer together in beautiful Cowdray Park!

And this present coming summer had its own expectant pleasures in waiting!

There was golf—and lawn tennis,—riding parties,—the races,—the glorious yachting,—the moonlight concerts! There were the field days,—the smart reviews,—the great naval gatherings, and, in the glow of the summer days, the whirr of the “cycle” wheel called to the brave and fair!

And now suddenly, Miss Lily Arnot was brought face to face with the fact that “this sort of thing could not go on forever!”

Then she resolutely mounted the stair and, with a slight defensive tinge of coldness, said: “Howard! what do you wish to say to me?”

The American had photographed the conventional

passers-by for the thousandth time in his mind,—that eminently decorous crowd of the selected British public, and he turned quickly as she spoke. “Only this! I intended to spend the summer here, near you—for your own sake!

“That is all over now!” he ruefully said. “If I go away on this quest to please your uncle, it is not fair that you should misunderstand me! I will only go with him—on one condition!”

The fair young girl was trembling now in a secret delight, which she did not dare to own! “What do you mean!” she said, as she nervously glanced at the open door! One moment of yielding to an impulse of the heart and she would have been the swift Camilla!

“I mean that I will only go with him—if I may come back to you! I know what Captain Enos is! All fire and flame at heart! He has some one of his Flying Dutchman quests ahead! I am perfectly foot-loose! But—I will go out on no path that does not lead me back to you!”

The secret of their lives was trembling on their lips! Howard Vinton’s Napoleonic boldness had oozed gently away, and he learned in the glances of the English girl’s eyes what it is to face a woman, standing trembling with a pure soul shining out of her fearless eyes!

“Listen!” he said, gently, as he saw her awakened soul struggling in her face. “Miss Lavinia has her own ideas! I saw it in her face this morning!” he smiled.

“As for Captain Enos,—he has no more sentiment

than a lobster! He is a perfectly unmanageable man! He will always have his own way!

"Now, he will be back here in an hour! He will start old Engineer Jack and myself off on the double quick! I will not be fired off like a projectile, point blank, even by Captain Drage!

"I will not be calmly snuffed out like a candle by Miss Lavinia! I leave my Yes or No to you! You have an hour now to think it over! Will you write to me at Smyrna if I go out with your Uncle Enos? May I come back to you,—after I have served that dear old thunderbolt, for your sake? Now I am going out for a spin on the Common! If I strike for Clarence Parade, the South Parade, or the Pier, I will show off to Aunt Lavinia! Don't answer me now! Think it all over! If you decide to say Yes to my desire to come back here, you can tell me on my return!"

The young Napoleon of Love edged toward the door with an artful show of manly decision.

"And if I say No, Howard?" faltered the Lily of Southsea, detaining her slave with a glance!

In her heart she knew that he loved the very green daisy starred turf upon which she had walked,—for her own sweet sake!

"If you say No!" replied Mr. Howard Vinton, raising her slender hand and kissing it tenderly, "I will not go out to the Levant! There are some men here chartering a yacht to go and shoot big game up in Kamtchatka. I

might as well be there as any other place,—if you decide against me!”

He slowly descended the stairway, and as he turned he saw her standing with her hands clasped before her, and the roses which he had brought to her that morning were trembling in her slender fingers!

The excited American dared not look up at the windows of the shaded drawing-room, but all unseen by him, two gentle eyes followed his retreating form with a suddenly awakened tenderness. “He goes out there into that dangerous land, giving up all his plans, and, for my sake!”

The Lily of Southsea whispered this in a fond apology to her wildly beating heart! She heard the sound of footsteps, and then swiftly fled away to her own room! She dared not admit to the blushing face which she saw in her own mirror that she had already decided that she would write!

But a sly rosy god, Cupid, of mystic power, had stolen into her heart, and the whisper of his voice had warned her. “He must not go away—forever!”

Lily Arnot lingered in the impregnable citadel of young womanhood, hidden from all, until the wheels of the arriving fly and the rasping voice of Captain Drage recalled her from a day dream!

“They must not suspect,” she murmured with an innocent dissimulation, as she descended, for the Captain’s voice was lifted up, demanding:

“Lavinia! Lily! Where’s young Vinton! I must see

him at once!" And so she descended, and turned over her prisoner, the old engineer, Jack Masterson, as a momentary stop-gap to the energetic veteran.

Miss Lavinia reinforced the garrison soon, and the sound of bustle proved the old sailor's haste! He sporadically explained his trip to the spinster while awaiting the return of Vinton! The sturdy old engineer was already off to make up his kit!

"You'll get your whole tip from Mr. Vinton!" roared Captain Drage.

"How do you know that he can go with you, Uncle?" timidly hazarded Lily Arnot.

"Go! Of course, he'll go! What did he say to you? Why wouldn't he go?"

And the gleeful girl then sped away to her hospitable duties fortified in her favourable decision by a dutiful desire to advance "her uncle's interests"! Neither of the women dared to question the old Sphinx!

True daughters of Eve, they enjoyed this slight flavour of imperative command which stimulated their peaceful lives!

Mr. Howard Vinton had slowly retraced his steps and waited till the fly had departed. He had taken a "bracer" as far as Nelson's old cannon and the great Victory anchor, and had gravely bowed to the returning Miss Lavinia.

"She has an eagle eye, that same dear old girl!" he shuddered. "She would lead a forlorn hope as gamely as the Napier brothers; and I must not open my

trenches till I am sure of her aid! And that dear old boy, Drage! Here I have studied navigation from the ark down,—I've roved over Fitting Basin,—Rigging Basin,—Repairing Basin,—and Steam Basin! I've burrowed on Whale Island. I've learned to know every porthole of the Victory,—every historic hulk,—every captured gun! I've chummed with the service from Boatswain to Admiral, at his bidding, and worn my soles out tramping the decks of Britain's fleet just to please him! I have even admitted that the British yacht can 'down us' at last! All this for—Lily! And now the dear old duffer drags me away! It's a long road, but it will lead me back to her, or Captain Enos Drage will have to navigate the Aegean Sea alone!"

The young man stole gently back into the mansion under the welcoming smile of the appreciative housemaid, who had a proper young sergeant of the Connaught Rangers on the string! She already discerned "Miss Lily's young man" to be a conquering hero, "in futuro."

Mr. Howard Vinton never knew if it was fairy,—passing angel,—or mortal woman, who glided by him as he was hanging up his top coat! But the sweetest voice in the whole world had whispered, "I will write! Go for my sake,—and—come back to me!"

"The Child" fled from the sound of her own voice—and when he joined the little circle at luncheon he observed one of his roses of the morning caught in the true blue knot at her slender throat!

Hence and therefore, Mr. Howard Vinton heartily cried: "Yes, Captain, I'll go! I'm game for anything, if you desire it!" when the veteran hurled out his question as to the young man's willingness, between two mouthfuls of "chutney."

"I knew you'd go!" Captain Enos nodded. "We've a good bit to do to get ready!" and then the laughing eyes of Lily Arnot told her triumphant lover what her rosy fingers would not even dare to write to him.

Miss Lavinia, in heroic mood, recalled Nelson's motto, as to England's expectations, and yet her heart really softened at the young fellow's prompt acquiescence.

When the hurried luncheon was finished, Enos Drage said, sharply, "Lavinia, I can tell you in half an hour all I wish to. So, you and Lily can arrange my kit for Malta. I leave for town to-morrow. Jack Masterson has a hundred pound note to break, and he will be aboard the Paris steamer at Southampton at midnight. I will go up there with Mr. Vinton and start him away. I take the 'four-forty' for London to-morrow. As we will have a lot of writing to do, Howard, you can just have a chat with Lily, while I talk with my sister."

So it fell out that two very embarrassed young people sat watching the dismal drip, drip, of the afternoon rain, which had thrown its gray shroud over sunny Southsea.

They could hear Enos Drage's explosive directions as he threw around his boxes and tossed heaps of re-

jected clothing around. His replies to Lavinia's anxious housewifery were staccato objections to taking enough luggage for a three years' cruise.

"I tell you, my dear old girl," he cried, "I don't know where I am going and how long I will stay! Moreover, I don't care! You are all right! You have 'the Child' to keep you company. My movements will depend on circumstances, and so, my stay may be three months, six, or even nine. The less I take the better. Don't load me down with kindness!"

The precious moments were slipping away. Howard Vinton had gazed at a South Sea idol, an engraved walrus tooth, a dried Japanese mermaid, and a Malay pirate's skull, neatly cutlass cleft, with a gruesome inscription, "E. D., 1853," but he dared not face the blue-eyed English girl, who faltered, "And your kit, have you nothing to pack, Howard?"

Her lover sighed. "Since I left college and placed my old aunt in charge of the family home, I have followed the rule of the newspaper army. A flat case with linen and a dress suit, my great coat, grip sack, dressing bag, and my travelling tweeds and serges are all I need, save a check book, pipe and pouch, a six-shooter, I confess, a good umbrella, and my old black-thorn. Of course, now, pith hat and puggery are *de rigueur* as a globe trotter. I need little; my wants are simple. We journalists, tourists, writers, or literary jacks of all trades, always fly light.

"Of course, if I had an English home, I should

need lots of things, and,—someone to pack them! I went in once to an outfitting shop of the Strand, and found that a 'British officer' needs an outfit of some twelve hundred pounds sterling, filling three or four wagons, in order to go and be slain by a naked Zulu, who goes to war with only a lozenge-shaped hide shield, and a barbed iron spear-head stuck in a stick, as his entire worldly goods."

The Lily of Southsea's eyes were downcast. "Your life is a very lonely one, after all, in the great world's crowd. You need a real home circle!" she sighed.

"I left the golden circle broken forever," sadly said Vinton, "when my father and mother joined their shadowy hands, and because of that same loneliness, England seems to me now to be my best abiding place. I do love your people, your clean-cut sense of right and wrong, the decent letting alone that one gets, and the general mental, moral and bodily cleanliness which divides you more sharply from the go-as-you-please continent, than your "silver streak" of the Channel."

Howard Vinton was eyeing Lily Arnot keenly. The presence of stern old Enos Drage, and the black satin armour-clad Miss Lavinia, had wrapped the girl in the pale grey reserve of British "good form." She was afraid of him,—afraid of herself,—afraid of her too expressive downcast eyes,—and afraid of the two case-hardened old life veterans, almost within ear-shot.

"That girl has not a single bit of feeling!" he groaned, and he then very gloomily recalled some lines

about "faultily faultless, icily regular," etc., etc., which, after all, did not fit the exquisite face of the woman whom he madly loved, and who knew, too, in her own little bounding heart, that he loved her to distraction.

Bible memories of "a party who served seven years for another party" returned to vex him, and he knew at heart that the demon of "cant," of "good form," of the old established social procedure, held them artificially apart.

His own captive manly heart was now beating under the very roses trembling on her womanly breast. He looked in vain for a sign of the graceful vision which had glided by in the hall.

The rosy lips which had whispered, "I will write," were pale and trembling enough when the decisive tones of Enos Drage were heard below in a bugle call to action.

"I will call a fly, Lavinia, and 'the Child' can take your list and get my things. She knows all the shops. Perhaps Mr. Vinton wants something! Ask him, for we have no time to spare. Vinton and I must now go over our business and make our private notes."

The measured tread of Miss Lavinia was heard upon the lowest stair when Lily Arnot sprang to Howard Vinton's side. Her eyes were filled with a strange new light. She laid her little hand upon his arm, and blushed rosy red as she whispered: "You have forgotten something! Let me get you, at least, your writing materials,—to write to me,—you know!"

It was well that Lavinia Drage was deliberate. Had she entered the room a moment sooner she might have seen a well-set young fellow kissing rapturously a pretty hand which had transferred one of the roses to Mr. Howard Vinton's coat lapel! She might have heard the whisper "Lily! My Lily! You must give me a half hour, alone, before I go! For, I shall miss 'the Child' more than I can tell you!"

The loving answer of assent was shining in the English girl's eyes when the satin-encased Lavinia boldly strode into the drawing-room.

Miss Lily Arnot, as became a soldier's daughter, was a bit of a strategist, and she had also learned diplomacy from the wise old "Shun Lee," who was a naval Metternich.

And so, with a demure glance, she hastened away for paper to jot down "any needful articles" which Howard Vinton might desire to "take along."

Had he been outspoken and honest, the first entry on the singularly foolish list achieved would have been a "wedding ring," and the second, "the Child" herself!

But, now dimly conscious that the final winding road toward the hymeneal altar led on toward Smyrna, with a future backward bend toward "sunny Southsea," Mr. Howard Vinton turned away from the Lily of Southsea, and slowly descended the stair to where Captain Enos Drage, R. N., was already seated at his desk, with a Mediterranean chart.

He had unrolled a pile of Eastern handbooks, and a couple of blank notebooks were at hand.

"Now, my boy, give me your undivided attention!" said Enos, as he locked the door. "I have got rid of the two women. We can go over this whole matter in peace. I wish you to understand all the risks you are taking, and the reward which is before us. Then, if you go in whole-hearted into this matter, it will prove to be the best operation of your life!

"I'm sending Jack Masterson to Smyrna with you. He is a game bulldog of the old breed. Sailor, steam engineer, man-o-war'sman, and globe trotter! I've seen him calmly handle the levers on a China river steamer when five thousand yelling pig-tails were sweeping her decks with a rain of gingal bullets. He drinks but little, and he is as honest as the edge of a sword. Jack has been my private property since the days of the 'Shun Lee.'"

"He knows the whole Orient, from Odessa to Vladivostock! He was 'first' on a volunteer fleet boat some years for the Russians, and he coasted the Black Sea, the Aegean, and the Eastern Mediterranean for them, for years. He knows lingua Franca, jabbbers Romaic and Armenian, and he has picked up Turkish and Arabic. With your faultless French, German and Spanish, you two ought to be a team.

"Of course Jack jabbbers Russian like a moujik! It's twenty years since he first cried, "Ya loublo," to the pretty Tartar girls at Odessa and Sevastopol. He is to

do what I tell him, always to obey your orders, and never to show his face here again, if anything happens to you. Now, what am I going out for?

"There's one place that is backed by a hundred million sterling—only one in England. It is the Chief Inspectorship of Lloyds! I don't need the money it brings, but I want to gain that place. I see my clear way to it if I can only break up this pirate gang of Komanos and Company. In the last ten years, they have baffled every one of Lloyds' smartest men. Old John Higginbotham will be Lord Mayor some day. He told me last night that the place was as good as mine if we can manage to succeed.

"The trouble is, that but one man at a time has been sent out there. Poor Robinson! He was most active and energetic. They soon found it out. They killed him like a rat, at Smyrna.

"Now, my idea is, that three men—you, I and Jack—can not be as easily watched, made away with, or fooled as any one stranger.

"I will leave Van Lennep to go right on in his place, and, while at Smyrna, you must never even enter his office. You can see him at the consul's, at the Hotel Huck, at the English Club, or ride out and go boat sailing with him. But, you are just to play the Yankee traveller, or a modern Eothen, doing the 'dreamy dilettante,' and perhaps a bit of newspaper correspondence.

"They are always deucedly afraid to kill a newspaper man!" roundly said Drage. "Now, I will have your credentials made out to the English ambassador at Constantinople, of the highest. You can always meet Van Lennep on the war vessels and at the consul's house, at your little dinners of three. Fitzgerald's a very good fellow. I will guide you from Malta, the consul will always attend to your mail and telegraph work, and on every British war vessel in the East, you will have a secret friend in its commander.

"You can take refuge or passage on any. Now, I'll call you to me, or join you, or send one of Lloyds' higher men, just as circumstances call for. Will you go? Will you take the joint risk? There's a splendid money reward, too, ahead of us!

"John Higginbotham told me that twenty-five thousand pounds would be presented by Lloyds for the breaking up of this dangerous gang. Will you go?"

Howard Vinton had just caught sight of the flower-face of "the Child" as she tripped daintily over the slate sidewalk to the waiting fly.

He said gravely: "I will aid you, Captain Drage! I may even get a book out of the thing! But I won't work for money. You can pay me in another way. You must have that Chief Inspectorship. We'll go in to win—Jack, you and I!"

Their hands met in a firm grip, as the delighted Enos cried "All right! You shall have anything you want! I knew that you were game to the core! And

the money—we'll talk later of that, when we have earned it."

It was three long hours before "Shun Lee" Drage had finished his minute directions, and Mr. Howard Vinton placed the notebook, filled up by "Shun Lee" himself, in his breast pocket.

"Burn that! Destroy it! Chuck it overboard, if you are ever caught in a tight place!" said Enos, when they had finished their first council. "Before you get out to Smyrna, Van Lennep and Fitzgerald will have this whole business by cipher cable and the Foreign Office sealed bag mail. Now, to dinner! The rest we can talk on the train. It leaves at ten, and your Paris boat pulls out at midnight.

"You can leave here at eight, and get all your traps. You move on Lloyds' money, remember, now—unlimited backing!"

Even the stern Miss Lavinia saw the necessity of giving the young American a chance to look over Miss Lily Arnot's purchases.

There is a rosy veil which covers even yet in memory the fond dissimulation of that half hour, but Vinton's eyes were misty when he examined the "stationery" on the voyage to Paris. There was a little case, with a picture which spoke of golden days far in the future, and a silken curl tied with a true love-knot of blue.

The picture was inscribed:

"Write to—your Lily!"

Bluff Jack Masterson watched the "young master" as they rushed along, snugly billeted "en second," over the beautiful Normandy dales.

"'E's in rare good trim, an' a thorough out and outer! As fit as a Derby winner!" the stout sailor ruminated. Howard Vinton had been his sailing companion on many a smart cutter dash in the choppy Channel seas, and the old engineer dearly loved the game Yankee.

Both of their hearts went back to Southsea, where old Enos was now "folding his Arabian tents" for the Malta trip.

Jack Masterson was fondly reminiscent of the rosy Abigail who was destined, later, to divide his "bit o' brass," as "Mrs. Masterson," and the young American dreamed of the fair dear head pillowed afar across the "silver streak."

"I think I'll consecrate that 'stationery' at Paris," he fondly decided. "By Jove! I'll write, too, and thank dear old Lavinia, and I'll send 'the Child' the very prettiest 'cadeau' that decent good taste will allow!"

For the "stationery" had been given him with a fondly whispered greeting to open it "only at Paris," and Love's gentle subterfuge told him what the proud lips of the English girl would not frame—her entire acquiescence in his being "paid off" on his return in kind—and—not in money!

And though parted and lonely days were the lot of

one, with dangers confronting the other, "the Child" and her manly, chivalrous lover were both strangely happy on their parting night.

Old "Shun Lee" slept that night with one eye open, and dreamed of the defeat of "Komanos and Company."

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW YORK HERALD'S CORRESPONDENT'S INSTRUCTIONS.

MR. HOWARD Vinton sprang alertly from the Havre train as it rolled into the Gare St. Lazare, and springing into a fiacre, hastened to his old haunt, the Hotel Choiseul.

Jack Masterson "bore a hand" with their slender luggage, and was as fresh as a three-year-old, notwithstanding several pulls at his flask in honour of "the girl he left behind him."

The head porter of the hotel tipped his hat, and handed out a couple of "petit bleus" with alacrity. He was glad to see the handsome face of the young American back again in the snug courtyard of the Choiseul.

"Send up a good breakfast to my room, Jean!" Vinton ejaculated. "Bifteck aux pommes, coffee, rolls, and all that, about enough for four Frenchmen!" Vinton

gayly indicated his brawny companion as a "mangeur extraordinaire."

"Look here, Jack!" cried the American, when they were safe in their room, "you must keep straight as a string. Captain Drage wires me that this suspicious steamer, the old 'Alessandro Cornaro,' is already on the docks at Trieste, fitting out for Smyrna. McGregor (once a chief of the P. and O.) is overhauling her engines. You must get a job on that boat at any risk. So mind your eye here. No frolics, you know!"

Jack grinned in triumph, as he blurted out, "Old Sandy McGregor, the king of marine engineers. Why, only the bottle kept him from being the head machinery inspector of the P. and O. I know every hair of his old gray head! I was 'greaser' for him when he ran the 'Bat' into Wilmington, through the whole Yankee fleet in '62. She was a water witch! But I went over to Liverpool from Bermuda with a cargo of cotton as second engineer, and then drifted off to China, with Sherard Osborn's gunboats, and later, wound up on the 'Shun Lee.'"

"Splendid!" cried Vinton. "Then you can count on McGregor. I want to telegraph the Captain."

"'Mac' will surely give me a berth, and he would share his last shot in the locker with me," said Jack, "but I warn ye, Master Howard, he's a dead game man. 'E won't give nothink away! For when he got the sack from the old line, he went into the 'fancy' service. 'E's laid a many a tender one in a soft berth,

splittin' the swag up with these tramp captains. Ye see the owners of a tramp steamer get her well piled with insurance, and when she's fifteen or twenty years old, they let her rip, and the cargo can take care of itself!

"Them cargo chaps is also fly to the game. They stick foreign companies and clean up all their old odds and ends.

"W'y, my eye! the warehouses of Antwerp, Rotterdam, Bordeaux, Liverpool and Marseilles, as well as Genoa and Trieste, are combed for all the old unsalable stuff to weight down these 'fancy ones.' An' then it's off, to choose a good place and—a fair excuse.

"No!" said Jack Masterson, filling his pipe with good smuggled "bird's-eye," "McGregor will stay by the ship and his orders. But we're on the cargo lay—a watchin' these damned land lubbers. Sandy won't care, and I'll tell him I'm keepin' out of the way of a little sheath knife frolic. He'll hide me for good.

"There's somethin' desperate up! For Sandy always gets his own prices. He was run all around the Black Sea, watched by insurance spies, when he had an old four-master with fifty thousand pound sterling covered on her worn-out carcass, and only sand ballast inside! 'E's that neat hand that he laid the forward half of her high and in the broad street of below Buyukdere and Istambol! He just rushed her down in the Bosphorus current at twenty-two knot an hour into a tide rip. The nose of her went bang up out of the water,

and the stern kept on a travellin'. Them there Turkish blacksmiths found an iron mine! They have been workin' the wreck up for two years, in house, shop and shipsmith work. She broke right in two amidships. 'E's a dare-devil is Sandy. 'Obey orders, if you bust owners,' 'e says."

With a sharp rap at the door, came a note for Mr. Howard Vinton, to report at once for instructions at the branch office of the New York "Herald," 49 Avenue de l'Opéra.

Vinton tore open the note, and shouted in glee as he read, "Come down and see the chief at ten sharp. He wants you to go out to Smyrna and watch the development of the Armenian muddle."

"Look here, Jack," said the American, "all that you have to do is to get on that boat, and stick to her till I meet you at the 'Scottish Arms' public in Smyrna. If we should have occasion to use Sandy McGregor on the quiet, Lloyds will pension him like a victorious general for life. Does he know the Levant well?"

"He can sketch every island in the archipelago from memory, and he was out with Hobart Pasha in the Russian war of '77."

"Well, I will start you straight on, by Munich and the Brenner Pass to Venice and Trieste to-night. All you have to do is to telegraph me to the British Embassy, Constantinople, and also to old Captain Enos, to 'Hôtel Croix de Malte,' Malta, that you've got your job. If there's any break, watch the 'Alessandro Cor-

naro' till she sails. Find out everything you can and then jump on the first Austrian Lloyds' boat and come on to Smyrna. You have the ticket for drawing your money from our Lloyds' agent at Trieste!"

"Aye, aye, sir, all snug, an'—the Captain's orders, too! I'm fit and right!" replied Jack.

"Then," said Vinton, "as I'm writing to Miss Lavinia to-day, I'll just tell her to keep an eye on Mary while we're gone. If you stand straight all through, both she and her brother will set you up."

"Good enough!" grinned old Jack. "There's that Fogarty, sergeant-major of the Connaught Rangers, him of the free-rollin' eye and the gold-crown chevrons, the old lady might as well forbid him the house."

"Jack," laughed Vinton, "when I get your telegram that you're aboard that ship, as stoker, greaser, steward, keeper, I don't care what, I'll write to Miss Lily and she will put Fogarty's eye out in a jiffy, for Mary dotes on the young mistress."

"You're right, so she do," said Jack. "I'm standing at quarters, yours to command!"

"All right! I'll go and telegraph!" said the American, as he sped away to the "Herald" office.

Howard Vinton never felt better fitted for an adventurous outing, yet as he drove along, his thoughts wandered back to the vine-clad St. Aubrey's Villa, where, at this very moment, the stern Miss Lavinia and "the Child" were deftly slipping many undesired articles of personal comfort into the four-wheeler now

waiting, ready to bear Enos Drage away to catch the London train.

Miss Lavinia, thoroughly broken in to discipline, asked very few questions, for she knew that her eccentric brother's business affairs were always confidential. The stern old veteran, to whom the world was but a beaten path, briskly bade his sister a cheery "good-bye."

"The old rule, my girl," he said. "You'll have a weekly letter, and, failing in this, a telegram, unless I'm at sea. I'll take the night boat over to Paris, run down to Marseilles and chance it as far as Malta with a Johnny Crapaud steamer."

"Will you see Mr. Vinton soon, uncle!" queried the cautious Lily of Southsea.

"Why, certainly, my dear child," cried Enos, as with a last glance at his watch he cried, in horror, "Drive on!" and so all of the loving message of the blushing girl which reached "Shun Lee's" ear was:

"Tell him ——" The rattle of the wheels drowned the sound of "the Child's" voice, and she retreated, in a sad confusion, into her own den.

And then and there she pondered for half an hour as to the propriety of "a girl in her position," telegraphing to "a young man in Paris."

The voice of Cupid triumphed, however, for Mary cheerfully bore the dispatch herself to the branch post-office.

And, strangely, neither of them mentioned it to

Miss Lavinia, who was now heroically setting Enos' rooms to rights. The Lily feared to own her hardihood, and rosy Mary, mindful of the absent Jack, decided "to stand in with all true lovers."

The curt nod which she gave Sergeant-Major Fogarty of the Rangers, passing on his way, in all his regimental splendour, the morning report book under his arm, to see the colonel, caused the chevroned Adonis to cry, "Holy St. Patrick, but we are high and mighty this morning."

For, with the strange inconsistency of womanhood, Jack Masterson's chances had improved fifty per cent., in the first night of absence. Women always go in for fortitude, and that sort of thing. It is the dear especial luxury of their charming sex!

While waiting for Mr. James Gordon Bennett to call him in, Howard Vinton pondered over all the rough hints of Jack Masterson.

He saw for the first time the schemes of the assured—the many strange ways of disposing of undesirable ships and getting rid of faked up and unsalable cargoes. The singular mortality among old broken-backed tramps, the dangers of certain long voyages and distant seas, now took on a new meaning.

"With a fellow like Sandy McGregor, and a sly captain to match, I can see where 'Komanos and Company' have a rich field to work in," he decided. "The rogues working ashore, the villains and thieves acting at sea. It's only on a par with bank wrecking, railroad

stealing, trust conspiracies, sham corporation floating, and visionary mines.

"God help the poor, confiding British investor!" he murmured. Stout old Shylock's words came back and haunted him. "But ships are but boards, sailors but men; there be land rats and water rats, water thieves and land thieves—I mean pirates; and, then, there is the peril of waters—winds and rocks.

"Sandy McGregor is a 'water rat,' and Komanos and Company are 'land thieves,' and I presume the astute Sandy will either pull out a sea plug, or else slap the 'Alessandro Cornaro' ashore at full speed as directed. The whole modern business game is now but Talleyrand's old idea, 'Other people's money.' If Enos Drage mistakes not, we three will have a lively old chase of it."

The clock dial told him that the last of the three agents of Lloyds had started for London, before he stood mute in presence of the strange man who is the autocrat of the greatest journal in the two hemispheres.

For, carp as you will, the New York "Herald" is the Herald,—that tells the whole story, "and great is Diana of the Ephesians!" The New York "Herald" sees as deeply into the tangled whirl of modern life as any other organ of public expression. It has the rare merit that it serves neither king nor prelate, party nor scheme, that it has no hidden spinal influence of unacknowledged guidance. It is simply and squarely

itself, and, without fear and trembling, it faces the thinking world!

Howard Vinton did not face the autocrat of the "Herald" very long.

With a nod the autocrat began: "Vinton, I want a reliable man to go over to Smyrna and watch the growth of this Armenian muddle for three months. I need a man whom I can rely upon, a man who will be always there, and not wandering in the moon when wanted. You can get over quickly by Constantinople, and then report by wire, here, your arrival. See the editor and get your special credentials and instructions. Can you leave to-night?"

"Yes, on one condition!" firmly said Vinton. "That I am not asked to leave Smyrna, and if my time runs out there I am free to watch over some private interests which I have there afterwards, until I report back at Paris."

"Good!" said Bennett, a slight frown melting away from his imperious brow. "We'll use other specials for any travelling duty. That's all! See Walton at once. Good-bye!"

And before Howard Vinton had reached the editor's room, the autocrat of the "Herald," buried in the smoke of his cigarette, had already forgotten the man and the assignment to all human appearance.

"See here, Vinton!" laughed Managing Editor Walton, "don't let the almond-eyed houris over there tempt you into any funny business. Don't rush off and pitch

into some fourth-class war as Pasha, Kaimaikan or Bimbashi. J. G. B. sends you out there to be there, to stay there, and not carve out a laurelled path to fame.

"Some years ago he sent Wilder over to Athens to await orders. There was a thousand pounds advance and a fat billet. Now, Wilder, who had roved over the world almost from pole to pole in the "Herald's" service, was an inimitable genius, a dashing fellow. He rashly studied the interests of the journal, and slipped off and mixed himself up in some exciting events near by.

"He telegraphed us a mass of stuff from his self-appointed station, and was simply rewarded for his zeal with orders to report here 'instanter,' to the chief in person.

"When he got here he received a bonus of six months' salary to cut off all old claims of gratitude, and—was sacked—forever. 'Where shall I go?' he said. 'Go to the devil,' was the chief's reply, and I think he's on the way there now! J. G. B. likes you. I know that. Don't think that he forgets. You stay there like a sentinel on post. He'll walk in here some morning and say, 'Call Vinton—at once—by wire!' If you are not there, he will quietly say, 'Cut him off, recall him, and,—drop him!' So mind your eye!"

"Don't fear! I will content myself at Smyrna!" answered Howard Vinton, with a vision of the future bend in the road leading back to the Lily of Southsea.

"Well, come back at four. I'll have all your cre-

dentials and papers ready, youngster," kindly said Walton. "One last word! There is no place in the world where more cosmopolitan deviltry is mixed up together than along the league of the long quay at Smyrna. Be prudent! Go around at night, and well armed, too. Let the fair Fatimas alone!

"There are hundreds of Greeks, Armenians, French, English, Germans, Italians, and all the wandering daughters of Eve, thronging the booths, cafes, theatres, saloons and cirques of that polyglot parade. 'Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice.'

"I think all in all the Smyrniotes of the business and official circles are the very foxiest devils alive. The five thousand resident Franks are up in line with the eighty thousand Turks, forty thousand Greeks, fifteen thousand Jews, and ten thousand Armenians!

"The place is filled with a gang of desperate adventurers, French, German and Italians, for no one police chief ever brings a man back from Smyrna. When they are not preying on the world at large out there, they just devour each other. And I grade them as follows in vileness: Jew, Greek, Russian, Armenian,—for the essence of human keenness is your Armenian! He double discounts the Polish Jew, who is Russian born, and, as the Irishman says, that 'bangs Banagher!'"

"The leading commercial circles?" seriously said Vinton.

"Oh!" replied Walton, "a number of great interests there are, of course, represented by men of character,

who get double pay for facing cholera, Turkish brutality, and the climate. Moreover, their families usually go out and try it for a season, and then drift back home. So it is that the sound of the voice of Mariamne, Zuleika, Maritza, and Fatima is often heard where an 'unbroken silence' is popularly supposed to rule. Men meet each other there in the clubs, cafés, the swell hotels, on board ship or at the consulates, but in their homes, as a rule, never. I sincerely hope that you are not impressionable, Vinton?"

"I am no squire of dames!" shortly said Vinton. "Our contract is for service under Minerva, the emblem of your august journal!"

"Don't forget your owls, and so keep both your eyes open at night in Smyrna. You'll need them," laughed Walton. "The riff-raff loaf around by day, but at night Smyrna hums with the winged messengers from the bottomless pit."

"I'm not afraid!" rejoined Vinton. "I've been already twice around the world. I have safely meandered the Bowery, I lived in Leadville in its palmy days, and I spent a year at Chicago!"

"That settles it!" replied Walton. "Say no more! You are prepared,—for the worst!"

The time hung heavily on the young man's hands while awaiting the arrival of Enos Drage's telegram from London, and watching for the hour of his departure. He had at last decided to convoy Jack Masterson on as

far as Munich, by Basle, and see him started off for Trieste over the Brenner.

For the mariner was like the graceful sea gull, sadly bewildered and out of place when on land and hemmed in by wooded crests.

"D——n me!" stoutly said Jack Masterson, "I go about here in Paris and either run ashore or miss stays. There's no seaway. It's the bloomin' houses as does it!"

Howard Vinton, suddenly sentimental, meandered the arcaded Golcondas of the Palais Royal till he found a fit "cadeau" for Miss Lily Arnot. It was a spray of golden lilies of the valley, caught up by a true lover's knot, with a little diamond trembling in each of the graceful bells.

"I hardly think that this little emblem will be misunderstood," mused the pilgrim of love, who now yearned to be off to Smyrna. He had dispatched it when he returned to the "Choiseul."

Jack Masterson was pacing the courtyard, as if it were the quarterdeck, and was now blowing a cloud in silent comfort.

Mr. Vinton was cheered with Enos Drage's dispatch from London. "Off to-night for Malta via Marseilles. Telegraph to the Grand Hôtel, Louvre, from Basle. All is well. Full mail dispatched to consul, Smyrna."

"The old sea dog is truly no loiterer," thought his young forerunner, as he listlessly opened the other, and

then he hastily walked away, lest the stout engineer could read the lines so strangely moving him.

Southsea seemed to be "sunny" in its very printed name, and he deciphered the Gallic rendering of Miss Lily's English with a tenderly awakened heart. "I expect you not to spare your stationery. Write to me from Paris."

The name "Lily Arnot" brought his wandering steps to a full stop! He instantly replied to the old veteran's business communication, and yet he studied some time before he sent his answer to St. Aubrey's Villa.

"I will not spare the stationery," he worded his lines, "and I will come back for more. Letters to-day—write to British embassy, Constantinople." He dared not write the words which her loving kindness brought up, for Miss Lavinia, stern guardian of the British proprieties, rose up as an awful shade before him.

"I'll not chance it," he sadly sighed. "Lavinia Drage is a person not to be trifled with. If she took a notion, Miss Lily would be quickly plighted to some ornament of Her British Majesty's service long before I have run the gauntlet of 'Komanos and Company.'"

There was a bit of Heaven's own blue just visible above the walls of the Choiseul, and he caught there the reflection of the far-off English girl's eyes, true blue, the colour of hope.

And then he left Jack Masterson on guard, "his watch on deck," and "went aloft" to pen as burning an epistle as his fanciful diction would create.

"By Jove!" he cried, "British honour is my salvation. The Lily of Southsea gets her letters intact, which may be a life-saving institution for me in this long Smyrna exile."

He made quite a serious inroad into the dainty supplies, for he seemed to "have left unsaid that which he would have said," and he now fully repaired the omission.

A few lines to await Enos Drage satisfied his whole ideas of duty. He returned from his final "Herald" office interview ready for the road.

"There's no screen in the world like the lucky strike of the Herald billet," he mused. "It will serve to keep the Turkish officials in awe, and the very keenest Levantine will not be likely to dig under my assumed occupation to find Lloyds' secret agent under the journalistic garb."

He refrained from pressing his sage counsels upon the robust Jack Masterson, and reflected that as yet neither Drage himself nor the man-o'-war's man knew of the real nature of the proposed deviltry of the Smyrniote cabal.

While the train rushed out of the environs of Paris, Howard Vinton reflected upon the singular good fortune which had so veiled his quest.

Happy Jack Masterson puffed his pipe and dreamed of the easy-going joys of Trieste. Under pretense of examining his notebook, Howard Vinton long studied

the face of the fair English girl whose life seemed to be now already interlinked with his own.

There were many added reasons found in Drage's secret notebook of instructions for the convenient cloak of "Herald" correspondent.

"You can leave Van Lennep to handle Alevra, the principal agent of the *Rüinone Adriatica*, and Lascaris, the resident representative of the '*La Nationale*.' He is obliged to have an extensive daily business and a friendly personal acquaintance with them. But be on your guard before Mons. Lyonel Bondy, representing '*L'Ancre*' at Constantinople, and his local agent, John R. Spiegenthal. Also, Reggio, of the *Imperial*, and Robert Hadkinson, of the '*Northern Insurance Company*.' All these are splendid men, but only engaged in handling fire and life insurance at Smyrna.

"But one unguarded word, the exciting of their keen professional curiosity, might cause you to be the mark of the vengeance of '*Komanos and Company*!' It is at Smyrna, as in all Oriental cities, any private person who is above the rank of bagman, or mere commercial traveller, is supposed to be either a business spy, a possible successor, or else a future enemy. Diplomats, army and navy officers and tourists are naturally exempt from these bitter local jealousies."

"It seems," growled Howard Vinton, "that the only friend whom I can count upon at Smyrna is Van Lennep, our Lloyds' man, and the fear of some disaster to both will naturally cause him to avoid me. I can, how-

ever, mingle with all the polyglot pleasure-seekers and voyagers as I will. For Smyrna seems to be a 'go-as-you-please place,' without any social scruples—a 'devil's auction.'"

The long night dragged away, and when noontime came the travellers were already rushing along past Geneva, on their road to Zürich. The glow of excitement which had characterised the romantic departure had faded, and Howard Vinton began to doubt his fitness for the singular quest before him. He envied the stolid lack of personal responsibility which characterised the rugged and adventurous engineer. The bluff Briton's stories of blockade running chases, Chinese adventures and tales of the kaleidoscopic life in the far east led by Enos Drage and his blunt follower, beguiled the long passage down the lake of Constance, and the hours fled easily away till the parting came at Munich.

Howard Vinton was surprised when Jack Masterson turned the tables upon him, as the Tyrol train was ready to pull out. He had outfitted the engineer with all possible care for the Brenner Pass transit, and gravely adjured him to be true to the interests of the stern old "Shun Lee."

"Don't fail to telegraph me to the British Embassy at Constantinople, and take care of yourself," said Vinton. "You go on a dangerous billet!"

"Oh, my eye!" responded Masterson, "I'm only a knockabout. My ten-pound kit is not worth stealing. There is nothing in the Levant for a man to fear who

has had to make his way with a cutlass through two score of yelling pig tails, and then, swim the Grand Canal under fire. These yellow devils can fight. They are merciless.

"But, Master Howard, you are going now to face the keenest scoundrels in the world alone. Everyone will suspect you at Smyrna. Take my advice, don't take nothing to drink out of your Hôtel, or the Scottish Arms, or the Consulate! You're only a mark for them scoundrels,—and an easy one! Don't you forget, too, to carry your 'Adams,' always well loaded, and have a knife and a good stick, too! They'll make a big play on you, too, those sleek devils of Smyrniote women mincing along the quay! There's four miles of Hell's own garden there!

"Ye see, ye can't go around much with Van Lenep! Don't you be caught off your guard a single moment, either with man or woman, or ye may wind up where many a fine fellow has—in Smyrna Bay, with a throat cut! It's when ye think ye're safe that ye're in danger!

"Excuse me," said the rough fellow, "but I want to go back home some day, and see ye drive home from the church with Miss Lily! Oh! I know! Mary told me! Bless you, she's got eyes like a ferret!" And the faithful fellow stood there with his blue eyes moist as the clanging doors warned him to break off his harangue.

The two parted with a mighty hand-grip. "Now

for the straight run to the Golden Horn!" cried Vinton, as he slowly drove back to the "Hôtel des Quatre Saisons." He was glad to report progress to Marseilles as to Jack's departure.

"If the three of us get in good position before 'Komanos and Company' can lay out their plans in full details we may yet show them that Greek can meet Greek and be checkmated! If we can only trace out the octopus arms of this sly conspiracy then a blow at the central knot will paralyse the monster!"

With a prudence now warranted by honest Jack Masterson's warning, Howard Vinton moved directly on toward Constantinople, with no eyes for anything but his rendezvous at the "Grand Hôtel Huck, Smyrna."

Fortunate in connections at Vienna, he was soon whizzing down the Danube with only two hours delay to catch the Grand Oriental Express. His artist eye ignored all the beauties of flowing river and purpled mountain.

With a special resolution of his own he affected the ordinary traveller of pleasure, and only aired his Yankeeified English. Murray's Greece, Harper's Guide Book, Mahaffy's Greek Pictures, Baedeker's Palestine and Syria, and other books on the Levant busied his mind in the three days which sped away like a dream.

Vinton was thoroughly at home at the Golden Horn and he lingered not a moment after reaching the Grand Hôtel de Pera. In the cloudless glow of the Eastern

skies he forgot the raw winds and the green tumbling billows of the Solent.

A single word with the Hotel Dragoman informed him that the "Apollo," Captain Beberovich was billed to sail at sundown for Smyrna direct. The words "Traversée directe en vingt quatre heures" told Howard Vinton that another day would place him on the line in the presence of the mysterious enemy,—first upon the field, and—all alone—save for Van Lennep's veiled aid!

In half an hour, the wearied traveller was seated in the secretary's office of the British Embassy. An alert rosy-faced British F. O. man conducted him to a private room after his private card had been sent to the Ambassador.

"You will understand the terms of this letter," said Second Secretary Grahame. "His Excellency is supposed, officially, to know nothing of your mission! Here are your telegrams and a letter. We will send all future matters in our own sealed bag to Consul Fitzgerald at Smyrna. I will send our Legation Dragoman down to put you aboard the 'Apollo' in our official launch. This will serve to give you a mysteriously aristocratic standing on the 'Apollo.'"

"You see," smiled the young diplomat, "your open circular-letter gives you all the privileges of an agent of the F. O., with no embarrassing red tape to delay you. Remember to always send out all your letters in the Consul's sealed bags! Let him also forward all your

telegrams. The Home authorities are very anxious to aid in breaking up these Eastern raids upon British capital, and so we will aid to protect the British purse. You must protect your own person!

“Let me say to you, and remember always, the Levant is the region where you must trust to no one, and, also, even think twice before you trust yourself! By the way, there may be some letters in the mail your train brought. If we receive them before the ‘Apollo’ sails, then the Dragoman will give them to you! He will stay with you till your departure, and bring back to me any letters and telegrams which you may wish to send!

“Seal all your correspondence as a matter of course, and also use cloth-lined envelopes! There’s your steamer lying down there ready at her buoy, off the Custom House Landing! I’ll send down there now and reserve you a passage if you wish!”

Howard Vinton’s eyes gazed out in rapture upon the splendid panorama of Constantinople spread out below their eyrie on the Pera Hill!

“Nothing in the world like it,” mused the Englishman. It’s a new enchantment every morning to me!”

The American understood the official delicacy of England’s representative in privately offering the aid of the Embassy to Lloyds’ secret champion, which he dared not in his official capacity.

“I thank His Excellency for all these kindly provisions for my safety and our future aid. I will be in-

finitely obliged if you will send down and secure my passage!”

He was now ready to “burn his ships” and cut off the thread which had bound him to his partners in the quest. For, bluff Jack Masterson’s words were significant. “Got my berth as Head Stoker. Coaling up now and taking in ballast. Sail in three days. My chum is on board. Telegraph British Consul—Trieste.”

“So old Jack is on the enemy’s quarter deck! The first of our men is at his post! And Captain Enos also sailed yesterday on the ‘Sphinx’ for Malta! Just like the old boy’s Spartan brevity. “Sail to-day ‘Sphinx’ for Malta. Report your arrival to me there as agreed.”

It was well that the Secretary lingered outside directing that the choicest rooms be reserved for “a traveller of distinction,” for Howard Vinton forgot his quest and all the machinations of his unknown foes to lovingly linger upon Lily Arnot’s telegraphed words: “Letters and packages from Paris received. Have written two to Istambol, rest to Smyrna. Auf Wiedersehen! Lily.”

The spectacle of a young man ardently kissing a very commonplace blue strip of paper and fondly repeating the tender words of the closing, caused the prudent Grahame to cough significantly ere he re-entered the sanctum. He was a veteran society man. “It’s just as well that you should be early aboard, for there are always numberless spies running in and out of the Em-

bassy! We are watched here like criminals. Take your luncheon down at the Pera.

"I'll send our carriage and the Dragoman over there the very moment the mail is distributed. The bags have already come in. Here are blanks for your telegrams, and also a half-dozen of our official covers. You can send all your letters back to me by him. I will attend to all."

"I shall have every pleasure in paying my respects to you and to call and thank His Excellency, on my return!" gratefully replied the rejoicing Vinton, who was the happiest man in Constantinople. For the blue eyes of the English Lily, shining afar in all their tenderness, seemed to beam down upon him in a presage of victory.

"I've something to fight for, at anyrate," mused Howard Vinton, as his carriage horses carefully picked their way along through the judiciously planted brown dogs encumbering every street and sidewalk on Pera's polyglot mountain.

"Should Enos Drage reach his life's ambition, this 'Head Inspectorship,' then even the adamant heart of Miss Lavinia might melt into an approval of an Anglo-American alliance. I'll be on hand to see the 'Alessandro Cornaro' steam into Smyrna. I think that I'll go in for boating, and so hire me a good lateen rigged cutter. Surely I can find some old stranded British sailor who can be picked up at the 'Scottish Arms' to be my man Friday!

"For there's no handsomer sheet of water for sailing than the fair Smyrna gulf, with the blue Aegean far out to the west, and its own glorious spread of forty miles by twenty. The little outlying villages, too, have many snug retreats, and I think that I will give my fellow Smyrniote the slip in the eavesdropping line."

The splendid *salle-à-manger* of the Grand Hôtel de Pera was filled with the very gayest groups of globe trotters, as Howard Vinton discussed his solitary luncheon.

Seated where the Golden Horn ran, a sapphire band, along to the west, and with the Long Bridge below him, dreamy Seraglio Point to the south, and Asia Minor's shores narrowing at the Tour de Leandre, Vinton forgot even his departure to gaze out upon the silver cone of Mount Olympus, rising far into the blue skies. He was still tranced by the words of the first letter in which the shy Lily Arnot had found the courage to open to her lover's glances the golden treasures hidden in the heart of an English girl.

Shy, sweet and noble, her loving words seemed to burn in his brain, and to tenderly thrill his heart. He knew now that only the screen of absence was needed to give to her the courage to tell him of how she felt the community of interest which now drew their beating hearts together.

With prodigious salaams, the Maître d'Hôtel soon announced the Dragoman and carriage of the English Embassy as awaiting "Monsieur." There was a reverential

awe in the manner in which the polite steward took his tip.

Certain bright-eyed birds of passage dreamily murmured, "Is he not an English lord?" Howard Vinton was truly the lord of Pera, for he had fed on the honey dew of the words of the woman, to win whose slender hand he now went forth to gage even his life.

There was a suddenly marshalled procession of the entire working staff, as the bronzed young traveller lightly sprang into the carriage which carried all the portentous distinction of the Union Jack!

Threading the slippery slopes of the inclined carriage way, Vinton was safely drawn through the howling muddle of the Galata bazaars to the crowded Customs' quay. A Turkish major sprang at once to his feet and salaamed deeply as the all important Dragoman waved his hand proudly toward the illustrious Effendi. A file of soldiers eagerly aided in the driving away of a fleet of caiques to allow the British Legation's steam launch to swing in at once. With a line of churned foam in its wake, the swift little steamer darted off to the "Apollo."

"I've the best of all the cabins reserved for 'Your Honour,'" said the Dragoman, "and Mr. Grahame has sent a special 'Laissez passer' in Turkish, which will procure you every respect. It carries with it your right to land in any Ottoman port in the Levant. And these two letters are for you, sir."

Seated alone in the little salon, with its plate glass

windows and rich silken curtains, Howard Vinton eagerly devoured "Shun Lee" Drage's last instructions from Paris.

"I went to the 'Herald' office to hunt you up. Walton kindly told me that you had a billet at Smyrna, and so our best hopes are realised so far. Our committee are urging me to make a clean sweep now that we have taken the matter in hand.

"So, youngster, my Chief Inspectorship now depends on you. For God's sake, listen to all and talk to none! Better sham ignorance of all foreign tongues! I will wait for your first report at Malta! The only man really dangerous to you is Émile Bouclair.

"As an *ex-déporté*, he is a desperate villain, and all the more dangerous for all his polish and early education. Van Lennep reports that Bouclair has just gone over to Constantinople.

"This gang of smugglers and villains lost their head devil in Captain Dimitri Nicolo, their pet commander, some time ago. He was run out of Asia Minor for knifing a Turkish Bimbashi at Scio, about a beautiful dancing girl.

"Bouclair has taken the dancing girl under his protection, so possibly the lover of Nicolo is not far off! Beware of any stray beauty whom you may meet. This one is named 'Agathe, the Serpent!' and with a Greek father, and an Armenian mother, has been so happily born as to inherit all the vices and none of the virtues.

"Van Lennep writes me that she has been playing

the lady at the 'Grand Hôtel Huck.' It might be well for you to seek other quarters if Bouclair really 'rules the roost' there. Van Lennep will point out to you every dangerous face.

"But keep shy on him in public, and look out for Bouclair and Nicolo, for your life, and my future is in your own hands. Don't fail to write to my sister Lavinia and to Lily. They are strangely anxious about your venture.

"Our whole opening campaign rests on Jack Masterson's getting aboard the 'Alessandro Cornaro.' I have written him to the British consul at Trieste that he shall be set up for life (with Mary thrown in) if he gets shipped on that steamer with no suspicion. Every consul in the Mediterranean and Levant will forward any tip that he can give us.

"As for you, command me in anything. Don't forget to play the ignoramus as to foreign tongues."

"Well, one part of your injunctions I will follow!" laughed Howard Vinton. "I shall studiously correspond with the ladies at Southsea."

The launch soon swept alongside the "Apollo," and the first officer, cap in hand, escorted the "Milor Inglese" to one of the two superb cabins sacred to the travelling "aristocracy." From the very moment of his arrival, Vinton tried to forget his German, French, Spanish and Italian. He schooled his tell-tale face as he wandered over the spacious saloons, now littered up with all the effects of twenty-five first-class passengers of both sexes.

Seated at the end of a long dining-table he penned his telegrams to Captain Drage, to Chief Stoker Jack Masterson, and to "the Child."

In an hour, the legation launch had swept away with its precious freight, a brief business report to the captain, and a letter which tenderly answered the communication in which Lily Arnot expressed her delight at the tokens from Paris.

"You shall and must succeed," she had naively said, "for Uncle Enos' very last words as he departed were that he could deny you nothing if you succeed. So I leave the choice of your reward to you. But you must come back to Southsea to claim it!"

The five-pound note which Vinton gave the Dragoon confirmed that haughty official's idea of the loftiness of the traveller's rank. He had not failed to visit each and every officer of the ship and informed them that a distinguished Effendi, a friend of the Ambassador, one who spoke nothing but his own tongue, was in their hands.

And chief steward and "controleur," made haste to assign to the milord, room and table attendants who spoke a fair "steamship" English.

Only the turning of the great screw dispelled the fleet of caiques, launches and hotel boats hovering there around the "Apollo."

Howard Vinton sat alone at the stern of the steamer and watched the matchless picture fade away behind him in the blue and gold of the sunset. Mosque-

enriched Stamboul, Pera, with its stern Genoese tower, Galata, where rags and jewels, luxury and starvation jostle each other, far away lines of gorgeous palaces, with the Bosphorus whispering at their marble steps, and Scutari, with its huge cypress groves shading the English dead. The "Apollo" swept on past Seraglio Point, where a half-submerged steamer still lay on the fanged rocks, below the last of the ramparts, once held by the brave Constantine Paleogus!

Gray and green,—pearl and gold,—dark ilex clumps, and shining silver domes, rose above the broken walls, where the cross went down at last before the crescent!

And on, out on the heaving bosom of the Sea of Marmora, the "Apollo" sped into the summer night. A single white star was hanging over the silver cone of Olympus as the last crimson rays dried up on its penciled summit.

The breeze of Asia drew freshly over the sea, and still Howard Vinton sat, watching the bubbling wake, his eyes fixed upon the spot where the bow of the sunken steamship showed black and red against the wall of the Seraglio. "Perhaps they are lurking even here—the banded agents of 'Komanos and Company!'" as he rose and went down to the saloon for the *table d'hôte* dinner.

In the "sociale halle," at the head of the companion-way, the list of first-class passengers was already framed for the benefit of the customs authorities of Smyrna.

The "controleur" had proudly flourished off "Excellence Howard Vinton, English Embassy, Constantinople."

While the American paused in amusement, a sudden chill ran over him, as he gazed idly at the names following his own. He read: "Monsieur Emile Bouclair, Smyrna;" "Monsieur le Capitaine Dimitri Nicolo, Scio," and "Madame Agathe Mitis." He slowly entered the cabin, ushered in grand state, to a seat by the side of the captain. He then cast his eyes around the four tables.

There was a busy laughing circle already chattering to the merry sound of popping corks. A dozen languages were mingled in a discordant chorus. The haughty reserve of a suddenly created "Excellence" now preserved Howard Vinton from self-betrayal. The bearded captain's groan of regret, "I spik not ze Engleesh," was received in silence with a deep bow.

The quick-eyed American had noted the card at his left, and the fact of two seats of honour vacant opposite. It was not hard for him to divine the identity of the trio who followed him, for the captain effusively saluted them in exuberant Italian.

"Komanos and Company," was Vinton's lightning thought. "She has found the fugitive lover," and, gazing furtively at the splendid woman with oblique, lustrous eyes and willowy form, he knew her rightly named, "Agathe the Serpent!"

CHAPTER IV.

AT SMYRNA!—IN THE GRAND HOTEL HUCK!—THE WILES
OF AGATHE THE SERPENT.

HOWARD VINTON took refuge in an almost morose gravity of demeanour as the safest protection against his dangerous neighbours. There was a long gap in the double-ended table, and the merry ship's doctor was presiding at the other end over an assemblage of a half dozen stars of the Cirque Giuletti, which annually stirs up the "four hundred of Smyrna" and maketh the shallow social whirlpool to boil like a pot. There was an easy abandon in the saloon, where each traveller furtively watched his neighbour.

Vinton dared not even to "size up" the three pickets of the enemy. "Lead us not into temptation!" he muttered, as he was now conscious that Agathe the Serpent was intently regarding him out of the corners of her darkened velvet eyes.

A glance told him that the self-possessed man at his left was the dreaded Bouclair, and that Dimitri Nicolo was at the side of the siren for whom he had wielded the assassin's knife!

The hiatus of nearly half the table showed that the captain was "in the house of his friends." The service

à l'Italienne gayly proceeded, the table being well dotted with flasks of Chianti, Lacrima Christi, dark Cyprus; and a Cognac and vodki stand, told also of Russian tastes.

Howard Vinton assumed the stolid Briton, and calmly ignored the sprightly table courtesies of the Levant.

“‘I will live up to my blue china,’ as far as Smyrna,” he mused. “I am a lord, at any rate, for this trip!”

By the time the circus ladies were playfully throwing bits of bread at the jolly doctor, and the wine-flasks were half-emptied, and the sounds from the other tables were distinctly Bacchanalian, Vinton saw the drift of the many little taps at the door of his cave of retreat. He bowed in grave negation to the successive demands of all his agreeable neighbours. “Parlate Italiano,” “Sprechen Sie Deutsch,” “Parlez-vous Français,” and “Habla V. Espanol,” all seemed to merely daze him.

“Dragnets!” he thought, as the good-humoured captain whispered to Agathe, “An English lord, immensely rich; he came on board in the embassy launch! The Dragoman himself put him on board. A milor Inglese on his world travels!”

There were eight keen eyes watching the expression of Howard Vinton’s impassive face. “I think that I can give them the ‘cold hand’ and the ‘marble heart,’ he decided, as he solemnly picked out his dinner, with the aid of the English speaking steward behind him.

“Thank God I have erased every mark from my

luggage, and all my papers are safe in the wallet around my neck!" pondered Vinton. "The captain is an easy-going comrade, and my stateroom might be ingeniously explored."

He reserved a detailed examination of the faces of the crafty three until he had at least half pistol range, to disguise the throbbing of his pulses.

The Sea of Marmora had narrowed, its low islands, with their white rocks, shining out on the darkening blue, were now veiled in evening shades, and Stamboul was lost above the bend as the swift "Apollo" swung her prow south and west, to reach the Dardanelles and glide into the romance-haunted Archipelago.

Vinton noted the sparing use of wines by his dangerous neighbours, but the jolly captain was no teetotaller. He grew a bit hospitable and a bit inquisitive, as he emptied his assorted glasses.

"Come up after dinner and let us have a friendly game in my cabin, Dimitri. Bring the Madame!" the mariner cried, with a frankly expressive side glance. "Is your old trouble all settled?" Dimitri Nicolo laughed gayly. "Emile straightened that out as soon as Rustem Pasha came back. They had hunted for me, but at Kastro every Lemniote is my brother. We all hate these Turkish brutes. I had timely warning of a search party, and so, I skipped to Odessa."

Howard Vinton calmly turned to the steward behind him, speaking in English, "Be sure and wake me at the Dardanelles. I want to see the ship pass the Strait!"

"All right, milord!" responded the eager servant. "We reach Chanak at daybreak, and halt there half an hour."

"Where do you put up at Smyrna?" cried the gay captain to Nicolo. "I must send the Madame some fruit ashore! I have the whole pick of the Constantinople gardens on board."

"Come and take breakfast with us at the 'Hotel Huck' then!" replied Nicolo, shaking his dark, handsome head in the direction of Bouclair. "If I am not there, Emile and the Madame will do the honours!" He laughed till the gold ear-rings in his ears danced and trembled. "My ship will be in the harbour in a week!"

Howard Vinton plunged his regards into his black coffee. "What is she like?" demanded Beberovich. "Bouclair picked her up at Trieste! He bought her, I only sail her! I'm told that she takes a stunning cargo. Five thousand tons dead weight!" Dimitri Nicolo proceeded to burn the cognac for his black coffee.

"What's her name, Emile?" said the captain. "Oh! you know her very well, the old 'Allessandro Cornaro'" said Bouclair, with a meaning glance which was lost on Captain Beberovich. The commander roared, "Well! That old four-master! It's an even race—if her masts will go overboard first or her engines through the bottom first!"

"You are mistaken!" decidedly replied the Frenchman. "She is just coming out of dock at Trieste,

almost entirely rebuilt, and McGregor has refitted her engines!" "Who owns her?" persisted the steamer captain. "Fifty of us are in the deal for five hundred pounds apiece!" cautiously said Emile Bouclair. "Don't you want a couple of shares?"

The bluff sailor laughed. "Not if Dimitri sails her, and old Sandy McGregor runs her engines! You had strangely bad luck last time. I'd sooner spend my money on Agathe there—at least I would know where it went to!"

The tall American calmly rose and then sauntered out of the saloon unconscious, as if he had no interest in the world save watching the great "Apollo" now throbbing along on an even keel, between the deeper blue of the star-lit sea and the spangled cobalt vault of the Eastern skies.

His firm, manly tread echoed on the deck long after the motley horde of the deck passengers forward were all sleeping like logs piled up, *al fresco*.

Pilgrims, dervishes, bashi bazouks, Russian devotees, greasy Jews, gaudy Greeks, smug Italians, bold Dalmatians and crafty Armenians were all muddled together in a polyglot mass.

The shouts and yells from the saloon smoking-room told of the gay throng who battled with fortune over the cards. The lazy sailors lolled on watch at 'fo'ksal, bridge and stern, while the sound of wassail echoed also from the captain's splendid private cabin.

There was the clink of glasses, the strumming of a

guitar, the sound of a *risqué* song, and once, as Vinton passed, he had a glimpse of Agathe executing a *pirouette*, glass in hand, her lithe form swaying under the wine-excited passions of the moment.

"The woman seems to be the go-between! Decidedly 'Komanos and Company' is a very social institution. We are all now converging to that interesting focal point, Smyrna. I shall have my eye on Madame Agathe, the beautiful serpent."

As it struck eight bells for midnight, Howard Vinton turned in, to be in readiness for his daybreak tryst with the "Dardanelles!" "Thank heavens! I've located the principal villains! After a conference with Jack Masterson I fancy that I will cable Enos Drage to move nearer, at least as far as Athens. They have a big scheme on hand, and the woman must have gone off in search of this corsair captain, Nicolo. So far they have not dropped upon me!"

Howard Vinton was in error! For in the splendid stateroom opposite to him, Agathe the Serpent was already dreaming of the cold, haughty young stranger. "He is not so bad looking—an English milord, young, handsome, and rich! He shall speak to me before tomorrow night! I have never failed yet! For he, too, will surely go to the Hotel Huck."

She laughed merrily as she thought how she could outwit the trio still drinking and gaming in the captain's snugery.

"They know not that I speak English, and so I can

fool even that tiger Bouclair. As for my Dimitri, bah! he is a child!"

A year on an English tramp steamer from Batoum to London, with a China run, and a long, homeward voyage by Australia, had given to Agathe Mitis a very fair knowledge of a tongue to which the corsair captain and his convict partner were both strangers.

"To travel with a milor, ah! *quel voyage en Orient!*" the saucy beauty murmured ere she slept, and—she builded castles in Spain.

While the "Apollo" ran in toward the scarped banks of the Dardanelles, under a late moon, two men were seated on the quarter deck of the "Alessandro Cornaro," now moored to a buoy off the Lazaretto, in the great basin at Trieste. With pipe and mug, they were making merry.

"How are your fires, Jack?" said a huge, overgrown, red-bearded Englishman of fifty-five. "Remember, we run out on the morning tide! The First will be off at three o'clock with the last of the crew! And, a rum lot they are!"

"I can have steam in an hour," answered Masterson.

"Better turn in and take a snooze, Jack!" said McGregor. "I'm in charge, you see. We'll get our new captain, 'Dimitri Nicolo,' at Smyrna. I had a telegram three hours ago that he would join us there. They want us to hurry on. I'll smash the old thing through now, for all she's worth!"

"What's our cargo, Chief?" demanded Masterson, with easy carelessness.

"Smyrna goods for London, if we ever get there!" laughed Sandy McGregor, as he refilled his glass. "This boat will load the heaviest cargo that ever left Smyrna, and far the most valuable. We've taken dunnage enough aboard to load her chock up to the Plimsoll line!"

"I'm glad of that!" lazily said Masterson, "and it's kind of you to help an old shipmate, for I want to work back to Plymouth! I've a girl there I must see, and I want to have a few shots in the locker. Is our money all sure?"

"God bless my soul!" roared McGregor, "we've got 'Komanos and Company' behind us, and they are as good as the Bank of England. Many's the good hundred pound tip old Schnorr has given me, down at Cadogan Building, Bishopsgate!"

"Why, they must be a rich partnership!" drawled Masterson.

"They are everybody in the Levant who chips in!" proudly declared Sandy McGregor, now well on toward his own "maximum load!"

"I saw that duffer Bouclair draw on Schnorr, by Reuter's telegraph agency, for fifty thousand pounds last time I was under their flag. I always got my own private orders by telegraph at Reuters, 25 Old Jewry, London, and for years, I could go in to the Agence

Havas, 8 Place de la Bourse, Paris, and tap Bouclair any time for a thousand francs by wire.

"They've always got a job for Sandy McGregor! Now, who would else have taken this old tub but me, and stiffened her up to stand a couple of good round voyages! And I have 'hornswoggled' the insurance inspection certificates out of these fellows here with a few 'five hundred lire' presents!"

Jack Masterson was reflectively smoking. "Is the ship well insured?" he casually asked.

"Bless you!" roared Sandy, "as soon as the inspection certificates reach Smyrna, Bouclair will plaster these Greek and Austrian companies with thirty thousand pounds on the ship! I am to get him the rating! A hundred pounds of red lead, zinc paint, and another hundred in presents easily did the business. She looks now like a new boat!"

"Boat ahoy!" cried a stentorian voice, as a cutter swept alongside, and a lithe Italian sprang up the companion way. "Hello, Skipper!" bawled McGregor.

"Are you all ready for the voyage?" hastily demanded the acting captain.

"Aye, aye, sir!" cried Sandy, slowly struggling to his feet.

"Then I'll send ashore for the barges now to bring the crew right alongside, and we'll run out at once. I've got our 'pratique' all signed, and we must hasten to Smyrna. I had another telegram to-night."

"I'll go, captain, with your message, if you will send the boat off. I left my own heavy kit ashore."

"Very good!" said the Italian, "but hasten back!"

"Sandy, you can start my men in at the fires! I'll be back in half an hour," said Jack Masterson, as he ran down and jumped into the cutter.

He made good his word, for he ran like a hunted deer from the landing, doubling like a hare, till he roused up his secret go-between—the agent of Lloyds of London!

"Here is my last dispatch to Captain Enos!" breathlessly cried Jack Masterson. "Take it down, and telegraph it at once to Malta! We are off in an hour!" and so Jack quickly condensed all of McGregor's babbling into good sailors' English.

"Keep my secret!" he cried. "These fellows would knife me and heave me over in a minute, if they suspected!" Without another word, Masterson dashed back to the quay where the cutter was already awaiting him.

A wheezy tug was dragging along a barge with twenty dark forms huddled therein, seated up on their wretched bundles. In the star-lit night the huge, ungainly bulk of the "Alessandro Cornaro" rose up high in the air, her red sides ten feet out of water.

A high fok'sal built in the bow, four enormous masts with huge swinging derricks, a bridge and house forward and a high built poop, made up as ugly an old colossus

as ever foundered in the inky darkness of an Atlantic midnight.

"Here goes, old skull and cross bones!" gayly cried Jack Masterson, as he donned his jersey and descended to the engine-room. Honest Jack felt a pang in betraying the sociable old chief engineer, but the solid attractions of buxom Mary Horton rose up before his eyes in their substantial charms!

"Full fires now, Jack! Bear a hand!" cried McGregor, every inch a sailor, drunk or sober. "The 'old man' has ordered all the steam we can give her, and so go ahead! You've got a dozen as villainous scoundrels as ever danced on the end of a rope. Remember! You, the two engineers and I make up our own cabin mess, and 'Komanos and Company' give us the best. Take it out of your men! They're used to it, and will only like you all the better!"

Jack Masterson told off his gang from the chattering mass on the forward deck. Lascars, Maltese, Cingalese, a couple of forçats, and two fugitives from justice in ten minutes were shovelling coal, half naked, on the dead equality of misery and debauchery.

The shipping master had put his own driver aboard, and at four o'clock the great "Cornaro" lazily swung down past the slopes of the "Triestener Karst," out into the gulf. A few lights blinking in the Theresienstadt, the Josefstadt and the Franzenstadt told of late revels, midnight vigils, or early misery as the old freighter lumbered along on the greasy waters.

Jack Masterson stole up to take a last peep at the black-walled old town, with its castle and crumbling cathedral on the hill, and the modern splendours of the Corso, and the beautiful new town.

In the lazarette basin, sixty great ocean steamers were now at anchor, and the smoke curled lazily up from the tall chimneys of the ship works, the huge soap works and rope walks. The vast lead works and leather factories were deserted, and from the barracks, no Austrian bugle sang.

Pacing the deck, watching the dawn pointing over the Julian Alps, as the waters turned from black to lead colour, and the stars faded out in the west, Jack Masterson gave his pipe a fresh load, as he surveyed the ragamuffin crew.

"Stole away, like a thief in the night, with a cargo of nothing, on a ship nobody owns, and with a crew of unhung scoundrels! A jolly old commencement, but,—the music will be coming on at Smyrna!"

Jack Masterson crawled below to watch his energetic slave driver goading on the poor brutes who toil by the month to gain the drunken license and frenzied forgetfulness of a day!

"If there's a hell on earth, it's the stoke hole of a tramp steamer!" said philosophical Jack, as he joined Sandy McGregor in the morning cocktail! Old Tergestum, a prize of worth to the fierce Illyrians, long before London was first mud walled, now lay far astern!

The strange old town where Jupiter's temple carries the golden cross to-day, and empire has displayed its storied eagle from the days of great Augustus, down to lion-hearted Maria Theresa, and the poor faded and feeble Franz Joseph! Sandy McGregor was laughing heartily over his glass.

"The skipper took time by the forelock!" he cried. "If the port authorities had seen this outfit, we would never have even catted the anchor! But, 'Komanos and Company' have long fingers! The old coffin is really making twelve knots!"

"It's a rum old voyage!" laughed Jack Masterson.

"Well! It won't last long after we get our load at Smyrna!" grinned Sandy McGregor, as he waddled to the engine room.

"I'll give these fellows their orders, Jack! Take a look at them every half hour, and, I'll turn in till noon! I only want you to keep them from blowing the ship up, and—your beauties down below there, from knifing each other! You can take it as easy as you like!"

"What a shame!" mused Jack Masterson, as he stole away to his room, and strapped on his knife and revolver. "There goes the best chief engineer of the Peninsular and Oriental—just what rum has made him!"

On the quarter deck, Tomas Corvini, acting captain of the great tramp, mournfully eyed the distant Apennines to the southwest, for there at Ancona, was hidden the woman whom he loved, with all an Italian's jealous

frenzy, and for whose sake, he roved the Mediterranean, a licensed pirate, and the fit adjutant of Captain Dimitri Nicolo.

"I'll be glad to turn the old rattle box over to Dimitri. Thank Heavens! He's back at Smyrna, and he'll be all right when he gets away from that snake-eyed witch Agathe!"

Mr. Howard Vinton was a light sleeper, and he sprang up, as the steward of the "Apollo" loudly clattered at his bolted door. "Dardanelles in half an hour, sir!" was the summons which brought him out into the cool and freshening dawn. There was only the drowsy deck watch at hand as the American sought the lonely upper deck. With a bird-like sweep the "Apollo" was swiftly gliding on, aided by a six-knot current between the narrowing purpled hills, throwing black shadows into the glassy water.

Two great white lights ahead showed where Asia and Europe now almost touched hands! The mast-head lights of three Turkish guardboats shone out in yellowish twinkles.

The European hills rose up sharply crested and towering high above, as the "Apollo" ran around the point and then entered the narrowed canal! The Asian shore showed a great square antique masonry castle, and as the dawn began to glimmer, Vinton noted battery after battery, these armed with the black grinning Krupps!

The engine bells then clanged loudly, and the great

ship drew up motionless, while swinging lights flashed signals from the Turkish guard frigates! The rise of dawn soon lit up the far hills and showed Kilid Bahr, with its triple square crenelated Genoese tower, and the straggling city dreaming amid the deep cypress groves of the western shore! There was a low plain to the east, with a pulseless river shining grey in the growing dawn.

Far away along its banks stretched little sleeping hamlets, and, trooping along over an antique bridge, a lazy herd of camels came down to drink, in the cool freshness of the breaking day.

Then flashed out long lines of circular tents, and a single wild bugle shrilly sang the Turkish reveille at a heavy isolated work. Across the waters from the huge casemated batteries of Chanak, the martial music sweetly floated, taken up soon, echoing from camp to camp, till all the straits rang again.

Listlessly the red flag with its white crescent and star was dragged up to the pole on the old keep, where the pious crusaders had guarded the cross in olden days.

Bands of red-fezzed soldiery now swarmed out around the interminable batteries clearly visible, and, in the light changing from rose to yellow and bright golden, the blue waters, the graceful palm-fringed shores, and the exquisite oriental landscape stole upon the gaze of the delighted watcher. With lightly dipping oars, a

guardboat floated toward them, and dozens of little canoes swarmed out, clustering around the great liner.

The two hundred polyglot deck passengers were now in a wild chorus, trafficking for all the dainties which the chattering peddlers conveyed to them by baskets hoisted up, when the glittering piastres had first been lowered.

And, to the north and south, came on the steamships of all nations now in the growing light, to humbly lie in line, and lower their flags in a mute pleading to the bloody Turk, to be allowed to pass scatheless, the guns paid for by monies borrowed from the Christian English. The impregnable batteries rose up tier on tier and the waiting line of vessels proved the degradation of Europe.

First, in column, was a superb Russian steamer, its merchant flag of white, blue and red humbly lowered with the blazoned double-headed eagle doing homage to the hated crescent.

"All this for gain, for mere profit," mused Vinton. "By Jove! It's as sneaking a trick as Komanos and Company could play."—He had drawn back into a little recess between the vast smoke stacks.

The sound of voices arrested his attention. The official boat was just rowing away, and the screw commenced slowly to revolve as the "Apollo's" prow pointed down the channel for its peaceful running of the gauntlet.

In an instant, Vinton had recognised Nicolo and his guiding spirit Bouclair.

"Did you get your letters here?" asked the Greek sailor. "Yes!" replied Bouclair. "Mustapha will be able to manage a quarter of our cargo—that's a help."

"I want to load in the upper bay, Emile!" earnestly said the captain, speaking softly in Italian. "You see you can take no chances! For, some of the boxes or barrels might break. If that cursed Van Lennep should find it out, I would lose all."

"Mort de Dieu! I will have him killed, if he bothers us!" growled Bouclair. "Yes, you had better lie well up the bay. The Salonique people will give us a good quarter of our stuff. I want to make this a big run! We may not have another chance so soon! The light barges can get up there, and you can move down a little as your load goes in! Five thousand tons will make a great deal of clatter in the bazaars."

"Have you all the Smyrna cargo ready?" asked the Greek. "I can give it all to you in a month. We will have the last meeting of the company as soon as these goods from up here are on board."

"Where?" was the captain's question. "Oh! at the 'Hotel Huck.' Of course I'll give a big dinner to the Port officials, and we can all gather and talk it over in my rooms. You are safer coming to see me there. Van Lennep will watch you," said Bouclair.

"You know he will. It's only by having Agathe stay at the hotel that you can have a good excuse to see me there in her own rooms, every day."

There was a quick start and Nicolo began hotly cursing and protesting.

Howard Vinton stirred uneasily in his place of concealment as Bouclair sternly said, "You jealous fool! The woman's necessary to me now. Van Lennep has his sharp eye on all of us after the last close shave. Only the killing of Robinson destroyed the proof! I've got to insure that cargo for sixty-five thousand pounds. We are playing for a fortune, and thirty or thirty-five thousand on the ship.

"Now, if Agathe were staying on the ship, you would be only a bewitched fool. She is the only one who can safely rally all our people. And stay there near to me, she shall!"

"Never! Never!" sharply cried the love-crazed captain.

Then, Emile Bouclair's voice rang out like a whip-lash, "I'll take the ship away from you! Forfeit your share in the run, and let Corvini do the job. The woman is no mate for a poor man! Better go down and ask her yourself! She will only laugh at you."

There was a growling altercation, and then a dead silence followed, for Dimitri Nicolo had sullenly yielded at last and fled away discomfited.

"So, even rogues can fall out, it seems! The old story. One woman and two men. And—Venus decides, at last, as usual in favour of the heavier purse."

With an anxiously beating heart, Howard Vinton stole away unperceived to his cabin. "I think that I

will now mentally photograph these two precious ones," he ruminated, as he carefully dressed and laid out his imposing series of Eastern guide books. "I will have an important budget ready for Enos Drage, on my arrival at Smyrna. And there, too, I must play my part with some little nerve, for one unlucky step would bring about either my death, or else the baulking of Enos Drage's secret quest."

The stake to be played for—"ninety thousand pounds"—was a brilliant one, and Howard Vinton puzzled his brain to know just what jugglery "Komanos and Company" proposed to employ.

"One thing seems certain," he said to himself as he approached the grand saloon, "I must never speak to Van Lennep, unless I am safe in the British Consulate, and then, only in Fitzgerald's private rooms. One of us, or both, might be soon made the prey of Bouclair."

Vinton was dimly conscious of a graceful presence, as he passed through the narrow companion-way. The passage was dark, and as he stepped politely back, a musical voice whispered, "Excuse me, my Lord!"

He had lifted his hat and murmured an unintelligible reply before he saw, as he seated himself at table, that the fair speaker was none other than Madame Agathe Mitis.

The chief steward gravely served the woman, to whom Howard Vinton had merely bowed in silence, upon taking his seat.

The captain's nod was his sole greeting, and the two quarrelling rogues had not yet appeared.

After a general inventory of the passengers straggling in, Vinton turned his glances toward Madame Agathe. Her own piercing gaze was now fixed upon him with a peculiar timid softness, an invitation, an entreaty, the suggestion of a secret!

And, when it flashed over him that she had addressed him in excellent English, his heart beat wildly. "Here is my one foe—my greatest danger—this fascinating beauty."

Howard Vinton had noted the cat-like swaying tread of the dancer, and he was free to glance at this dangerous charmer as she bent her swan-like neck toward the gallant captain.

"I suppose that those two angry rascals are having it out on deck," mused the American. "Evidently the sailor here is making hay while the sun shines!" For the classic head with its coils of blue-black hair gracefully leaned toward the ardent mariner.

Agathe Mitis was in the very flush of Levantine beauty at twenty-three. Tall and lithe, her easy movements as she swayed toward her gallant, told of the sinuous muscles of the dancer, moulded in Greek form.

Her hands and arms were a sculptor's model, and the small nobly-poised head was as graceful as any goddess of the weird days before great Pan died. Rich budding coral lips vied with the deepening roses on her cheeks and her replies as the sailor murmured in the

flowing Italian told of her morning of young Life and Love.

The veiling lashes were long and silken, and as she stole a glance at "Milor," Vinton started at the strangely ophidian effect of her oblique eyes, with their restless burning pupils. He longed to be alone, for he needed to take counsel of himself.

In a few moments Captain Dimitri Nicolo strode into the saloon, his red silk sash giving him a bandit air.

Thirty years of age, well knit, sun-browned, with crisp curling black mustache and a mat of clustering hair, the pure olive and faultless outlines of his classic face told of the true heirship of the degenerate Greek blood, the faultless body without a soul.

His brown, finely formed hands were disfigured with the sailor's blue tattooed star, and the golden rings danced in his ears as he broke in upon Agathe's *tête-à-tête*.

The woman blanched and, casting down her eyes, listened as he whispered in a fierce low monotone.

"Just the kind of a chap to leap over the quarter of a becalmed yacht with a knife in his teeth, at the head of a swarm of scoundrels!" mused Vinton. "Bold, fearless, reckless, and born in the fierce Lesbian breezes blowing from Mitylene's accursed shores."

There was a stolid, ugly look on Emile Bouclair's face as he sullenly seated himself at Howard Vinton's side.

With a frightened look, Agathe Mitis glided out of

the cabin as she saw the two men scowling at each other in silence. "The kestrel leaves the hawks to fight it out alone," was Vinton's amused verdict, as he profoundly bowed to the Captain, and rising, strutted around the spacious saloon.

He could well observe the rounded shoulders and bent form of sturdy Emile Bouclair. The head was round and slightly bald, the jaw coarse and heavy, the lips pendulous and full, and his long strong arms were those of the strangler.

Discreetly clad, quiet and bland, the escaped *forçat* had the jaded air of one who has been bowed down for years under brutal restraint. The neck and hands were burned a mahogany red, Guiana's true climatic mark, and the cold, round, crafty grey eyes told of one who knew well how to wait. Running easily from Italian into French, Bouclair's typical shrug and air of blasé wickedness spoke his origin in the slums of a great French city.

"The head to plan, the hand to execute," thought Vinton, as he gathered his books for a day on deck. "Gare le corbeau!"

"There is a fellow to begin a quarrel with, by—just killing him at first."

Alone on deck, stretched out in a great Japanese wicker chair, Howard Vinton dreamed ominously of the coming struggle.

The ship sped swiftly on out of the shaded bluffs where old Troy once stood, to unmask the smiling blue

Aegean with all the glowing islands of the Archipelago rising up, in graceful hovering outlines.

He knew them all, Lemnos,—fair Strati; Imbros and Tenedos, wind-swept in the channel, and fair Mitylene, famous for its “*innocenti pocula Lesbii*,” the rich draught that Horace loved, and, even yet, infamous for its withering vices and blasting crimes, done in the name of Eros.

He could hear the flute-like voice of Agathe as she lingered in the enamoured Captain’s bridge-house, and his pulses bounded as her low laughter floated out on the balmy air.

Away, at the prow, as the “Apollo” rushed over the sapphire flood, sending a huge triangular wake behind, two manly figures were seen in vigorous gesticulation, as Nicolo and Bouclair “had it out!”

Vinton was startled at this dropping into the very thick of the enemy.

“These sharp scoundrels will be too much for Van Lennep and myself!” he mused. “They have friends in every port. I cannot openly strike back. Van Lennep is surely doomed, if he actively quarrels with them. They were evidently up here to meet their secret confederates, by appointment.

“The Turkish officials can aid them, with giving an official sanction to their movements. I must call Enos Drage as near me as possible—and—at once! The ‘Alessandro Cornaro’ will be on hand at Smyrna in a couple of days at most!

“Sixty-five thousand pounds on the cargo—thirty-five thousand on the ship. It is only this well-bred scoundrel Bouclair who can handle such a vast scheme. Local help, even Dimitri Nicolo’s villainy, and Sandy McGregor’s crafty underhanded skill, are useless, all unless Komanos and Company craftily cover the tracks.

“There’s Jack Masterson to watch the cargo and the ship’s movements, Van Lennep to spy upon these two fellows at Smyrna, and Enos Drage to follow them up, and marshal Lloyds’ avenging forces,—while I—will be penned up in the Grand Hotel Huck, with the hardest task of all—to fight in silence—and to play a waiting game, with my life in my hand.”

The young American laughed as he compared the personal attractions of Bouclair and Dimitri Nicolo. “The young Greek captain has fifteen years of youth—his lover’s passion—and the strain of the wild blood in him, to draw this woman close to him. He has also risked his life for her.

“They both need Bouclair! He is the veiled Mokanna of this forty thieves conspiracy. Madame Agathe will surely obey the cold Frenchman’s sullen demands. She is now his familiar spirit, but, she will steal away later and betray Bouclair to the lustrous-eyed Greek. At the last, she would go where her stormy blood would call her, to the arms of her chosen lover. A drugged cup, a wicked stab, the first felucca, and then,—ho! for the caves of Kastro!

“For once the ‘Alessandro Cornaro’ has made its

mysterious run, with its rich cargo; Dimitri Nicolo will be enriched. If the storm breaks on anyone's head, it will be Monsieur Emile Bouclair who is betrayed!"

Howard Vinton wandered over the ship and watched the blue islands slowly receding. "I will be among a nice gang at the Grand Hotel Huck," he ruminated. "My stay will be as safe as sleeping on a charged mine. I will call Captain Drage at once, over to Athens.

"And, at a pinch, he can secretly get into Smyrna and hide on a British war ship, or at the Consulate.

"If the 'Cornaro' starts from London, he can easily reach there a week in advance, by Constantinople, head the vessel off, and then secretly cable to the Insurance authorities, that is, if she ever gets there. I suppose that Nicolo, Bouclair and old McGregor will pick out an easy place to lay her bones.

"Do they mean to simply wreck her, or to scuttle her and then hide all evidence of the fraud?"

The presumed "Milord" was followed all over the steamer by the obsequious attendants. In vain he sought the seclusion of his own cabin.

As he entered it, he saw the fair face of Agathe Mitis, in half hiding at her own door. He was startled when she smiled, and laid a rosy finger upon her lip.

"Here's a devil of a new complication!" angrily cried the disturbed American as he bolted his own door. He glared out of the porthole in silence. "I'll go forward and chum with the motley deck voyagers," he

grumbled. As he turned, something fell from the opened ventilator of his room.

He stooped and picked it up, for a spray of myrtle and a rose with a twisted paper fell at his feet. He had seen the gallant captain of the "Apollo" hand the same flowers to Agathe that very morning, but the twisted paper was all her own.

He read: "Come to the Hotel Huck. Do not speak to me here. It would be dangerous! I will find a way to meet you there. Beware of everyone, and watch over your room."

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish!" the youngster wrathfully decided as he hurled the note out of the porthole, torn into little bits.

But, on second thought, he placed the rose in a carafe of water in his rack. With a calm face he passed out upon deck and sought the colour panorama of the main deck.

He was not vain enough to imagine he had made an "impression de voyage." He felt assured that Agathe the Serpent was no mere meddler.

"I know what I'll do. I'll go direct to the English Consulate, and deposit all my papers there, sealed up in the safe, and I'll get me a servant, too, from Fitzgerald, a man to stay night and day, in my rooms. Lloyds can foot the extra bill.

"They have become suspicious of me! Perhaps they saw me this morning in my involuntary eavesdropping."

Howard Vinton was not well versed enough yet in

the crafty crimes of the Levant to know that Captain Beberovich had excited the professional curiosity of Dimitri Nicolo.

For the easy-going sailor had told the rogues of the splendour of the young English Lord's arrival on the boat, "personally conducted" by the sacred Legation flag.

Over the love-inspiring Cyprus the Greek had whispered to Emile Bouclair a very neat scheme.

"These young fools are always rich—rich to a marvel! He will go blundering around Smyrna, and poking over the old castles,—the Lake,—Homer's grotto—and wandering far into the interior.

"I can get a half dozen good Greek fellows," laughed Dimitri, "to carry him off, and, we can then hold him for a great ransom. A night's run in a felucca would land him in the hands of the bandits behind Athens."

Emile Bouclair whispered, in his thick voice, "Better still, if Agathe can indulge in a little flirtation, we can ransack his rooms and so find out all about him first. If he has a great banker's credit, we could lure him away, and force him to sign it, then—fix him like Robinson!"

It was the cold brutality of this suggestion which caused Agathe Mitis, with only a wayward woman's reason, to warn the young English Lord.

"They would kill him!" she murmured, that night while Howard Vinton dreamed of the blue-eyed "Child." "He is young, and—not bad looking! He shall not be trapped like a dog!"

And, so the beautiful stool-pigeon of Komanos and Company led on by Fate, strangely decided to shield the secret enemy of the man she loved—for the mere vague reason of a light woman's passing fancy.

And, open-eyed, mistrusting nothing but the offered amourette of a dancing girl, Howard Vinton strolled among his fellow voyagers as the far-away point of Smyrna Bay loomed up to the east.

He forgot the stern struggle awaiting him, as at noon, a line of turbaned and shaven Dervishes, squatted on their prayer carpets, intoned the prayers ordained by Mahomet, led on by a green-turbaned Mollah, whose voice quivered as he led the chorus.

In beards and rags, across the ship a dozen Russian pilgrims from Kief, piously crossed themselves, and chanted their devotions on their way to Jerusalem. Zaptiehs, Arabs, beggars, squalid women and half-naked children swarmed, while the circus animals sent up a din from below. Lascars, Coolies, Malays, Maltese, Greek brigands in starched skirts and broidered jackets, grave Turks in red fez and single-breasted frocks, glared at each other in a forced amity.

On the main hatch, a great tent was lifted of shawls and richly-coloured striped fabrics. Rugs and cushions, mattresses and silken pillows were covered with veiled women, in a voluptuous abandon.

A leaden-eyed old Pasha, his blue coat starred with silver war medals, smoked his nargileh amid the crowd of women, guards, eunuchs, babies and pet sheep, guid-

ing all with a word, and bearing an air of infinite patience. Baskets of fruit, sweetmeats, musical instruments, jars of spring water, pots of flowers, parasols, umbrellas, little coffers and large red trunks made a fortification, behind which the soldiers promptly kicked off anyone approaching the sacred harem tent, loading them with fierce curses.

Jars of wine, the old Greek amphorae, were not lacking, and the veiled beauties lazily puffed the cigarette, held in their henna dyed fingers. The five harem beauties coddled each other's babies, and an endless luncheon of bread, cheese, fruit, honey and preserves was going on all the while.

Several old women shrouded in black, watched the five beauties whose hands were decked with silver rings, turquoise set, and wearing golden circlets with diamonds.

"Domestic felicity à la Haroun al Raschid!" smiled Vinton, picking his way back to the quarter deck.

The near approach to Smyrna brought out at last a pale-faced Russian princess, whose one finical French maid, two robust nurses in Muscovite dress, and a dandified Nubian negro page bespoke her opulence.

The saloon passengers were all scattered about in excited groups, preparing for the inflictions of landing, and a dozen Jews and Armenian merchants were noisily gambling in the smoking room as Howard Vinton descended to his luncheon.

In the cushioned half-circle of the "Ladies' Social,"

the American saw Captain Dimitri Nicolo, eagerly pleading with the lady of the serpent eyes, whose lovely face was averted as Vinton descended the stair.

But, through an open window the Yankee saw Emile Bouclair gazing at the loving pair with a cold malignity which made him shudder.

"How I would like to turn my old Winchester Express loose on you, you pattern rascal," mused Vinton, with the instinctive aversion of a man for a human beast. And yet he brushed elbows with the man who was now calmly plotting his murder—for the mere greed of gold—to rob a traveller's purse!

"I am surely in the mysterious Orient now," said the astounded American as he looked around his state-room. "Is it a well-meant warning?" he whispered as he noted two beautiful red roses, where he had left but one. "Someone has been here! Can it be that she would dare?"

He strove to read the meaning of the two red roses. It then flashed across his mind that red was the oriental emblem of death by violence. The two roses. The two villains,—would-be murderers! "I will outwit these scoundrels," he swore. "This is a warning,—and—from a passionate woman's heart, and sent by her kindly hand!"

He discussed his solitary meal in silence, only gazed at by Emile Bouclair, who enjoyed his meal with all the calm deliberation of a Parisian gourmet.

"A sort of cross between an escaped swindler,—an

unfrocked priest, and a broken-down actor!" decided the American, as he mentally photographed Bouclair. And Victor Hugo's description of the eyes of the pitiless "devil-fish," "le pieuvre," returned to Vinton. He was conscious now that the ex-convict, and veteran commercial fraud was watching even his slightest motion.

It suited Howard Vinton to run directly under the guns of the enemy. He was brave with the self-reliance of youth. "I will give these two scoundrels a fighting show," he decided. "I may force them to come out of their shells. Perhaps a Colt's 41 cartridge—long,—may stop some neat little stroke for this galley slave." There was but one on board who could verify the disgrace of Bouclair.

It was the lustrous-eyed woman who had seen the scar of the deep-red letters T. F. so well burned into the brawny shoulders, that a dozen powder flashes did not scar out the mark of the "distinguished consideration" of the French government, for Emile Bouclair's abilities in forgery,—fraud, embezzlement, false papers and financial deviltry.

It was near sunset before the steamer captain parted with Madame Agathe and Nicolo who had riotously breakfasted in the official quarters with the enamoured sailor. Howard Vinton's modest kit was ready for landing, as the "Apollo" gracefully turned to the east and then swept into the glorious bay of Smyrna.

A huge red modern earthwork with six great Krupps on a point to the south, was soon left astern and the high brown mountains rose up on three sides with the blue haze and vegetation making a vast background of blue and gold.

The long, flat mole, the great Customs' landings with the blood-red crescent flag showed before them, with Smyrna rising in its amphitheatre to where the gaunt old castellated fortress hung over them upon Mons Pagus.

There were a dozen steamers already moored out to the north, with clouds of boats hovering around them. Across the sapphire bay beautiful villages clustered to the east and north, and, from the overcrowded ferry-boats, the music of Tzigane bands floated out upon the sparkling sea.

There was the stately mole, running three miles to the east, in an unbroken line, with all the cafés and pleasure gardens, open to the cool northern breeze.

Under the forefoot of the steamer, a splendid lateen cutter raced along. Its graceful sail was hovering like a bird's wing over the thirty-five foot hull. Stem and stern were painted bright blue, the sail was striped red and white, the hull green, banded with one-third its depth of white.

The crew, in gay Greek jackets, with red fez and sashes, were as picturesque corsairs, as the fleet cutter skimmed away.

"That's my tip. I'll hire a boat like this. With one

staunch fellow, I'll defy these fellows to get my scalp, without a run and a fight for it."

The great liner slowly drew up, swung around, and then fired a gun for pratique.

Perfectly composed and on his guard now, Howard Vinton watched the dozen boats with consular colours, and the awning-covered barges of the competing hotels nearing them. The familiar ensigns of "Cook" and "Gaze" soon appeared, and then his eyes fell upon the giant sign "Grand Hotel Huck," painted across a four-story mansion on the quay, with its outhanging galleries, facing the bay. Not five minutes after the insolent Turks, scimeter at side, had straggled up the gangway, the steam launch of the British Consulate raced alongside.

And, then, Howard Vinton paid the price of greatness. The cavasse, silver knobbed stick in hand, mounted the deck. In a grave silence he presented a note to the handsome "Milor," who was now the envy of the passengers.

For, the "Laissez-passer" of the English Ambassador had caused a great commotion. There was a huge battle ship, and a racing-looking cruiser, with a saucy corvette lying at a cable's length, and, over them, flew the undefeated flag of Nelson.

"It's something to be an 'English Lord,' after all," thought Howard Vinton, as he went below to tip the servants.

For, the earthquakes which threw down the old

Ionian city on the Meles, the wars of Antigonius and Lysimachus, the Roman sword or the bloody Turkish scimeter have never affected the outstretched hand. The horseleech has sons as well as daughters, from the remotest antiquity. Howard Vinton had noted the absence of the two warning roses in his deserted room, but there was left in their place an abundance of myrtle and a sprig of forget-me-not!

He hid these little emblems, and turned to go. As he did, a soft, burning hand caught his own.

"Remember," the soft, sweet voice whispered. "Watch, for your very life! We shall meet!" and, with a swift rustle of drapery, the graceful gliding form vanished.

He mounted to the deck with a fluttering heart, and gazed out upon the vast tiers of stone houses, the far-sweeping hills, the great, silent cypress groves of the dead among the living. The anxious passengers hung over the side and vigorously cursed the calm-faced man who departed, with much Turkish salaaming. His luggage was cabalistically franked. As the curtained launch sped away, he turned his head.

Already he knew the graceful form of Agathe the Serpent, and one slender hand waved a kerchief as he gazed. The touch of the landing electrified him, for he was now on his battle ground. Leaping into the carriage, in ten minutes he was safe in the private rooms of the British Consulate.

A door opened, and a cheery voice exclaimed:

"You are on British soil here, my boy,—and,—here is Van Lennep with letters and telegrams."

The two men had hardly shaken hands before Vinton poured out his story. "Ah! Then!" cried Van Lennep: "It is a fight for your life, now!"

CHAPTER V.

THE RICHEST CARGO OF THE LEVANT! IN THE OLD CASTLE.

THE anxious-eyed agent Adolph Van Lennep gazed silently in the eyes of the British Consul as the young American told his brief story.

"Hold on! I have it!" cried the grave-faced Consul. "The carriage is still in front. I'll send Sergeant Foley down with our young friend to engage his rooms and to leave his own luggage there. Foley can also have a room there en suite, and play secretary and factotum to 'His Lordship.' So, we will have one of us always there to watch Komanos and Company.

"Gad! My Boy! You brought the head devils all along with you. Leave all your private papers here. You've nothing but linen, clothes and personal articles in your valises. Foley will engage rooms, register you, and then return with you here for our dinner. We must not let them think for a single moment that you are on your guard."

And so, before Howard Vinton saw aught of his new friends, save that Van Lennep was a deep-eyed, bearded German of middle age, sad and watchful in his manner, and that Maurice Fitzgerald was a rosy, cheery-looking Briton, he was leisurely rolling along the scene of Smyrna's nightly schemes, feasts and love intrigues—the wild Vanity Fair of the long *quai*.

The chattering Turkish porters were just beginning to arrive with the goods of the passengers still penned in the Customs yards, when Howard Vinton was ushered into a splendid double set of rooms on the north front. "The very best in the house," said the obsequious Head Porter, proud of his English fluency.

"Quite retired. No one near you, but Monsieur Bouclair, who has the corner suite of three rooms, 'en permanence,'—and, at your left you have the gallery, for fresh air, and the evening coolness."

The horses of the Consul General of Her British Majesty were already prancing before the door as Vinton descended, ready for his dinner. The watchful Foley whispered: "You've left nothing, sir, that would interest anyone else. You know what all Oriental servants are."

"Not a thing!" smiled Vinton, startled, for the dark witching face of Agathe Mitis was now before him. She held in her hand two rich, red roses, and, at the head of the stair suddenly turned and pressed them to her lips!

At the foot, Monsieur Emile Bouclair and Captain

Dimitri Nicolo were being loudly welcomed home by a half dozen magnates of the great social centre of European Smyrna.

"The birds are in the nest—and—the snare is set," gayly hummed Vinton as they trotted briskly back to the dinner table waiting the suddenly promoted "Milor."

"Who is Foley?" the American queried, between his soup and fish.

"Oh!" laughed the Consul. "He is our 'D'Artagnan,' a sort of a general utility hero who was formerly a brave sergeant of marines and was badly wounded at Alexandria. He needs a mild, dry climate. He is the typical warrant officer, cool, brave, steady and has only one enemy, the Irishman's foe,—the bottle! But, he's a fair clerk, a good sportsman, and he is up to every Levantine dodge!"

"Just my man!" cried Vinton. "I want him to get me one of these Greek boats, and so I can keep away from the gossips by knocking around the bay and the nearest islands."

Fitzgerald laughed. "Foley's cutter, the 'Eros,' is the prettiest thing in the archipelago. He knows every inch of the shore from the Dardanelles to Athens, and as far down as Rhodes and Candia. I've a couple of my extra men who are his crew, and I often send them over to Scio, with dispatches, for boats that don't stop here. So, hoist your admiral's flag, when you wish to."

Before the dinner was over, Adolph Van Lennep and Vinton were in an easy accord.

"Now, gentlemen," said Fitzgerald, "I've the minister's orders to obey you blindly, as to sending out all your communications. The committee of Lloyds has cabled to me, as well as Secretary Hozier of Lloyds, now on his yacht 'Conqueror,' at Malta. I will leave you when the dinner is over to your first work. I will always send your dispatches in my official cipher, and my sealed mail bags are at your service. I can already see by the hubbub among the merchants and the insurance brokers that some big venture is contemplated.

"The purchase of the 'Cornaro' is known on the exchanges here. The crafty head devils are gathering in. It is for you to watch and trap them. Let me warn you that the Turkish officials, high and low, are hand and glove with these fellows, but they all deal with Bouclair only as a confidential fellow.

"You, Mr. Vinton, can make yourself privately known to the American Consul and tell him you will veil your 'Herald' relations under the guise of an English gentleman of leisure. I will sustain that character for you!

"But, you and my friend Van Lennep here must never be seen together in public, as intimates. I will vary the day of our dining here by messages through Foley, and each of you can come alone here as you will. You had better knock about town for two or three days, Vinton, on the usual sight-seeing. Foley, well armed, will accompany you, and I will give you my carriage and cavasse, if you go out to the environs.

"When you run over the railway to Bournabat and Aiden, I will conduct you myself. I will see that you are invited on the British warships. But, I cannot attempt to aid you in your quest, without betraying myself, and so, perhaps, defeating you.

"It is clear that you should summon Captain Drage to come over to Athens at once, and wait for events there. There are twenty chances a week to run over to Athens, and, either you, Foley or Van Lennep could slip away from here unnoticed.

"If he came here, his rank would of course make him a guest on the fleet, and, the London Committee write me that Drage has never made a stay at Smyrna. That's one good thing. They will surely load this ship with a rush, on her arrival. My chief clerk tells me that there are forty barges already loaded with cargo here, and we have made out over a hundred consular invoices already.

"I can watch, and can post you—but the whole Turkish gang, from governing Pasha down—are hand and glove with Bouclair. Of course, as to papers and inspection, the Moslems will 'go it blind' for Bouclair."

"Then, it would be useless to try and interfere with them openly here?" said Howard Vinton.

"Perfectly!" said Fitzgerald, rising and leading the way to the smoking-room. "They will be sure to have a customs-guard of Turks on board the ship,—the Moslem bargemen have zaptiehs on board their lighters,

and you'll find that there's not a man on the 'Cornaro' not of their gang.

"No! It will be a stern chase—and a long one! You can only gain all the facts, and, let Captain Drage find a pretext for official British action, or the seizure of the ship. The whole Moslem system is rotten with backsheesh and villainy from the Seraskierate, and the Sublime Porte, down to the meanest official!"

"And," said Van Lennep, "as to our young friend's life at the Hotel? We don't want him to run against Robinson's fate. They will not harm me,—until after the big deal is pulled off safely, at anyrate," said the sad-eyed German.

"Mr. Vinton must eat only at the public table d'hôte. Foley will have my secret orders. I will send sealed bottles of mineral waters to your rooms. And, wines from my cellar for safety. You must never touch your lips to a single thing not served at the public table d'hôte. I will put your name up to-day at the English Club. It's only a few doors away. And, never go a moment out at night without Foley.

"Another thing!" smiled Fitzgerald. "It's all well enough to enter the respectable pleasure gardens along the *quai* with a friend. But, beware of sweet Fatima's eyes! There is absolutely no redress in the East for social imprudence. The public conscience is curiously callous. I can officially certify Smyrna to be the very worst town in the world, morally! The point of this warning lies in the application of it. All your mail and

communications will be handed to you by me, and never touch a pen except here! Van Lennep's office is foreign ground to you—shun it!

“Make not a single acquaintance here, save through my own confidential introduction. The halo of the English Lord, ‘en mufti,’ will be a great safeguard to you. As for your sleeping, Foley will fit the hotel doors with chains and Chubb locks, and so he can guarantee the inviolability of your rooms. Not a scrap of paper do you sign save here. And,—you, Mr. Vinton, must absolutely seem to ignore the ‘Alessandro Cornaro,’ and everyone aboard of her.

“You are sufficiently warned as to Bouclair and his gang. Beware of them! I shall secretly verify your health and presence, and I shall have something private to say to the good widow Huck as to your comfort. She has to ignore the deviltry carried on in the best hotel in Asia Minor.”

It was half an hour after Consul Fitzgerald had left them, before the two champions of Lloyds had decided upon their telegram to “Shun Lee” Drage, and Van Lennep had gone over the secret report of Jack Masterson.

Adolph Van Lennep then summed up their joint decisions. “I’ll go and send the telegrams. You can send for Foley and arrange for your boating excursions, and ‘doing the lions.’ It is clear that Nicolo will be pinned down to the ‘Cornaro.’ She will be here in three days. In a week Captain Drage can be at Athens.

The business of Komanos and Company will engross Bouclair by day, and at night, he and his friends will make merry near you with Agathe and her sister sirens.

"You can meet the engineer 'Jack Masterson' in secret at the Scottish Arms, and I can follow the progress of the cargo brokerage,—insurance schemes, and we will be ready to act. There's but one danger imminent now: Don't be led into any secret meeting with the dashing Agathe. For I've an idea that both Nicolo and Bouclair will dog her movements. Jealousy is the most peculiar ferocity of Levantine intrigue!"

Howard Vinton smiled. He possessed a talisman, now resting on his heart, in Lily Arnot's dispatch welcoming him to Smyrna, and the last cabled instructions of Enos Drage had roused him like a trumpet call.

Sergeant Foley's merry eyes danced with joy when Vinton ordered out the "Eros" for the morrow, and, after Van Lennep had privately slipped away, the socially promoted American waited for the official carriage to ostentatiously convey him back to the Hotel Huck.

"It is a swell thing to be an English Lord—even 'en amateur,'" laughed Vinton, when Fitzgerald gravely objected to allowing "His Lordship" to proceed to the Hotel without due ceremony.

"Tell me, Consul!" demanded the American, "how did a fellow like this Bouclair ever get such a foothold here?"

"It's only a story of Turkish cupidity," said the Consul, as he lay back enjoying a last chibouque.

“Eight years ago a gang of very clever International forgers operated in London, Paris, Hamburg, Berlin and Constantinople. They were headed by a desperate fellow named Chapman, who had a beautiful wife in London. As an artist engraver, they depended upon ‘Bader the Dutchman,’ a gifted scoundrel with a dozen aliases who had been run out of Europe, into America, and then—back again, by England, to the Orient. Their neatest job was victimising the Ottoman Bank at Constantinople out of forty thousand pounds.

“Some sneak thief had purloined some blank official drafts of the English Minister. It was found later that a Queen’s messenger had cashed a small Legation draft at the *Crédit Lyonnais Agence* in Galata. ‘Dutch Bader’s’ work was so well done that it even deceived the Foreign Office, and was duly paid—the fraud only being detected later on the arrival of the ambassador’s monthly summary of official disbursements.

“This cool fellow Emile Bouclair was then in hiding in Constantinople. He had once been a man of some prominence in Parisian business circles, and he probably had obtained a hold on some French employé of the *Crédit Lyonnais*, for the draft was presented through the *Crédit Lyonnais* by Bouclair, who had escaped from Guiana.

“The whole gang then came on here to Smyrna and were finally nabbed here. There was no legal evidence to hold Bouclair, but the unlucky Chapman and his friends were all sentenced to ten years in the English

prison at Constantinople. Three of them escaped by connivance, but Chapman was too heavily ironed.

"The scoundrels went to England and blackmailed the devoted wife of Chapman, who gave them all moderate sums and sent them off to South America. She had received the proceeds at Stamboul and reached London in safety with the bulk of the funds. Bouclair gained the poor prisoner Chapman's confidence, and through the Turkish officials saw him daily in his prison. He then lured the poor, fond woman over here under pretense of buying Chapman's liberty.

"Up there in the dark, lonely, cypress cemetery—she sleeps to-day, dying suddenly while Bouclair was supposed to be away at Scutari. And—there was no golden treasure found in her poor effects! She had turned as black as ebony after drinking some coffee prepared by a servant of Bouclair's who disappeared.

"Now, Chapman was duly interrogated, for a minor confederate cried 'Haro!' The distracted man denounced Bouclair and then divulged the whole plan. The betrayed prisoner was shot while trying to escape.

"Emile Bouclair only laughed at the prisoner's wild ravings, and so he returned here vindicated, to become later on, a prime favourite of the governing Pasha. The Bankers' Association of America,—Scotland Yard,—the Bourse authorities of Paris,—Berlin,—Amsterdam and Frankfort then grimly hunted the fleeing criminals down, one by one. And this cur Bouclair has gone on, from easy comfort to open insolence!

"There is no power to verify his identity with the escaped French *forçat*—for, naturally he sails under a changed name, and a skilfully disguised appearance. It is significant that all his intimates here are Greeks, Jews, Armenians and Turks.

"I once conducted a secret 'personal inquiry.' A Scotland Yard man came out here. We could not, however, connect this dangerous fellow with any of his English crimes, and so the cowardly robber who betrayed his poor confederate is free of all but Turkish control.

"He operates in business through others here, and the signature 'Komanos and Company' wielded by him alone, probably represents some fifty of the smartest scoundrels in the Levant. He seems to be impregnable to fate."

When Howard Vinton drove down, along the *quai*, a double line of promenaders already extended along the garish frontage of the gay pleasure gardens.

Out on the moon-lit bay flitting white sails gleamed, and the sparkling stars hung dreamily over the great ruined keep on Mons Pagus.

Crowds thronged all the al fresco enclosures, where already, across the rows of round tables with the merry drinkers, could be seen saltimbanque and painted artiste doing their weary "turn" to amuse the heavy-eyed revellers. Hoarse yells and all the frantic outcry of an Asiatic summer night resounded in the side streets.

Sin laughed and ogled its prey under its painted mask,—the Greek cut-throat and Turkish prowler slunk along craftily in the shadows, and the great anchored ships loomed up black on the stagnant waters of the bay.

Hundreds of graceful boats glided along, the spearsmen ready to strike the foolish fish rising to the light, and the clatter of the street peddlers of sweets and lemonade arose in its harsh chorus, "Orea! Orea!"

Sergeant Foley gazed in an amused interest at Howard Vinton, who muttered, "Bedlam let loose!" "Here's your best friend in Smyrna at night, Your Honour!" cried Foley, tapping the butt of his heavy Adams revolver.

There was a crowd of filthy beggars, a swarm of *laquais de place*, and a dozen officers' servants gathered around the Consul's carriage as Howard Vinton ascended to his rooms.

"My secretary will attend to all my wishes. He speaks the languages," remarked Vinton haughtily, as the maître d'hôtel aired his fragmentary English.

It was already a balmy season, and Vinton sat silent up in the airy balcony of his apartment, his head throbbing with all the excitements of the day.

As the moon silvered the swelling waters of the bay below, a voice rose up almost at his very side, in a passionate strain.

It was Agathe the Serpent, tired of castanet and tambourine, who chanted "Si vous n'avez rien a me

dire!" Shouts of applause, and the clash of glasses followed as the concealed singer struck the last chords of the accompaniment.

"They are truly making a night of it," mused Vinton, as he sought his rest, and then, the careful Foley, examining both apartments, displayed a store of Harvey's club soda, bottled claret, and carefully took post in the outer room, his revolver and night lamp at hand.

The American pilgrim started up in the darkness as the singer, resting her voice, played the "Last Rose of Summer" with a meaning emphasis—was it a hidden message, a secret warning against uncanny grim spectres of the night?

He had carefully examined all the walls. They were solid, and the windows, too, were clear of helps to an escalade. His own trusty "Colt" was under his pillow, and he fell asleep at last in the vain effort to follow the rich melting chords of Tom Moore's exquisite song.

He was haunted in his dreams by a vision of the beautiful Agathe, her ophidian eyes glowing with a soft fire as she stood with her curved lips pressing the roses which she had stolen back, their mute message delivered. Her voice whispered again, "Remember! Watch for your very life! We shall meet soon!"

And, in his uneasy dreams, he saw the grey-eyed Bouclair stealing upon the poor convict's wife, the

woman who died to set her guilty husband free—by the witchery of the stolen gold!

And, then, two gentle blue English eyes shone down in Love's glamour upon his dreams. He forgot the glowing rose of the poisonous Orient, his lips murmured, "Wait! Lily! Wait!"—and, in his dreams, he walked with her again where the beautiful Isle of Wight hovers far over the Solent, beyond the pleasure walk of the Marine Parade!

Tinkling camel bells sounding below his window, a chorus of afrites and a general reveille of deviltry brought Howard Vinton to his feet at early dawn. The old soldier was already astir, and much marvelled the Italian waiters at the English lord's frugal breakfast, for they judged all mankind from a kitchen standpoint. "Now about our sail!" cried the impatient Vinton.

"Easy as rolling off a log, sir," said Foley. "We take the first carryall ready here, for my boat's moored to the quay a half-mile up! I'll give you then a freshener spin in the 'Eros,' and you can take a dive overboard, and I'll land you here later at the very door of the Grand Hotel Huck. To-night I'll buoy her off the front here and have two men sleep on board of her. We can run down the bay then when your big tramp steamer is signalled from the fort, and so get a first good look at her."

There were twenty nationalities astir in the brisk

morning air when Howard Vinton returned from his first double tack across Smyrna Bay.

The sea breeze had blown away all the haunting dreams of the first night in Asia, and he was in a capitally good humour as he strolled along the main city front. His dash overboard had brought out all the elasticity of his rigid Anglo-Saxon muscles, and so he calmly contemplated a flaring yellow affiche on the walls.

“Quick Dispatch for London! Merchants’ Line!—The A1 iron steamship ‘Alessandro Cornaro.’ Nicolo, Master (6,000 tons register), will have quick dispatch for London, direct, via Malta and Gibraltar. For freight or passage apply to

“Komanos and Company, Consignees.

“Emile Bouclair, Agent.

“Immeuble Photiades.

“Will discharge at London Docks.”

“Well! These fellows certainly do not hide their light under a bushel!” mused Vinton, calmly, igniting his first morning cheroot. “What in Halifax are they up to? Do they wish to run off with a rich cargo and make a fraudulent bankruptcy—or do ‘the barratry act?’ Perhaps it will turn out a strange case of shipwreck. They must be fearless chaps. Here they are, out in open daylight, and their plans are surely already made up. Ours, alas! are yet in nubibus! But—the

stern chase may finally tell the whole story! Oh for Jack Masterson!"

It was with a flutter of curiosity that Howard Vinton strolled along into the "Scottish Arms," where, already, before noon, the lazy "off-duty" men of a dozen foreign ships were lounging and drinking.

Sandy McPherson, a battered old sea dog, in fez and bawling in a half-dozen languages all rolled up into one jargon, was loudly prating of the voyage of the "Cornaro," as Vinton drained a modest B. and S.

"It's something to brag on in a port as has three thousand vessels a year going 'outward!' This 'Cornaro' will take out the very richest cargo as ever left Smyrna! Nigh onto a hundred thousand pounds in value! The 'Merchants' Line' will soon carry the banner! It'll take the stevedores a month to put five thousand tons on her! But it makes money flush here in Smyrna!"

"What flag is she under?" asked a loungee, over his mug of Bass.

"Greek, of course. 'Komanos and Company!'" answered Sandy, with an expressive wink. And Vinton strolled out as they all laughed. "That sly fellow gets all the loose money of the old countrymen coming over here," said Foley, "and besides, he does a lively bit of smuggling."

"Who loads these ships?" demanded the American. "The crew are all turned ashore for a run—only the officers, cooks and watchmen stay on board! These Moslem chaps put her cargo in chock up to the hatches

and seal 'em up! You see the Christians won't work under the Mussulmans' orders here, and neither will they obey the Giaours! The Turkish authorities always make a good thing of it, and so they have it all their own way. They have their own easy habits, and just knock off for prayers, or a chibouque whenever they feel lazy—and, that's most always.

“The smart Greeks and Armenians live by swindling, while the other Europeans here are on special jobs, and besides, the foreign crews couldn't stand up to the sweltering weather here. The bloody Turk is bound to have his own way, anyhow.”

And when they reached the Hotel Huck, Howard Vinton found the Consul's carriage waiting.

“I'll have the rooms all snug when you come back from luncheon, sir!” cried Foley, touching his hat in military style. “And then I'll just lay around here, for points, and do a quiet bit of locksmithing. You must give me some dummy work to do to fool the servants.

The Consular carriage driver had his orders to show the lordly visitor all the bizarre panorama of mart and arcaded street, vast interiors piled with the riches of Anatolia, Bagdad and Persia; the crowded bazaars where the noisy multitude chaffered; the cool mosques with their entrances chained up to warn away the unbeliever; all the hospital, church, walled harem enclosures, tier on tier of houses steeped in the fierce glowing sunlight, and all the varied chattering bustle of busy mole and the vast basin where the great ships lay

packed together like sardines, their bowsprits rising high over the thronged roadways below.

A hundred costumes—fifty different tribal insignia—all the colour medley of the splendid East; donkeys, goats, Arab chargers, hoarse babbling camels, and dashing equipages poured pell-mell along the stony pavements.

Crowds of lazy soldiery lingered on quay and mole and patient porters groaned under bale, barrel and bundle.

Innumerable peddlers and squalid beggars thronged the streets, where in the shade the glazed-eyed Moslem droned over the hubble bubble, and waited patiently upon Allah.

Money changers' stands were met at every corner, and from the latticed windows above, pale-faced women, shrouded in muddy blue cotton and half-covered by the treacherous white veils, lingered there in a sad-eyed listlessness.

Mr. Howard Vinton was most ceremonial in making his toilet to meet the American Consul, and the fitful dreams of the night returned to vex him when he drove away from the Hotel Huck.

For, from a window above, deeply curtained, a freshly culled rose fell into his carriage. At the corner he raised his eyes and saw the cautious flutter of a white hand.

"Angel or devil—she is on the watch!" mused Vinton, as he drove away to secretly meet the American

Consul in the safe haven of Fitzgerald's hospitable home.

He had agreed with the British official and Van Lennep that the American official should be genially hoodwinked in order to save the important interests of the friends now coming into the arena with Kommanos and Company to struggle for a fortune—perhaps even life.

Howard Vinton's eyes were now fairly well opened to the desperate scheme.

"They probably mean to clear as a nefarious profit in some way the whole gross value of the vessel and its cargo! And this golden ninety thousand pounds is a tidy sum!" mused the American. "I will 'confidentially' unfold myself to the American representative here as a secret 'Correspondent of the New York Herald.' In this way I can use him, when necessary.

"But, for convenience, he shall know that I have assumed the character of a 'British aristocrat,' so as to travel without let or hindrance, throughout all the Turkish dominions." The fortunate provision of the "Laissez-passer" from Constantinople served to back up Vinton's story when the two gentlemen lingered after the host Fitzgerald had driven out for his airing.

"You have done well," laughed Major Willis, an old war veteran, who enjoyed the dreamy repose of the American sinecure Consulate. "You will be free, Vinton, to go and come unchallenged, as long as you keep up your well-chosen masquerade.

“For, the fierce Turks are ferociously jealous about Armenia, and all the internecine troubles here. They despise all unnecessary writing, and hence our good missionaries are sharp thorns in their sides, with their good natured zeal in saving souls that are not burning for salvation. And—the missionaries really burden the mails.

“I’ll be glad, of course, to quietly entertain you. But, keep away from my office. Come to the English Club, meet me here, or at my residence; but you must avoid me in public. I will send out all your Herald mail and press dispatches, under my official frank.

“You have done wisely to choose British protection, for fear alone rules the Turk. That’s what makes the shadow of the English flag an oasis of absolute safety!”

He led Howard Vinton to the window and showed him the three great English war vessels, with the “meteor flag of England” proudly drooping at the mizzen.

“Keep up your masquerade, your ‘laissez-passer’ is good for the interior as well as the coast, and you can go unchallenged where an American correspondent would be baffled, insulted, turned back, or even imprisoned. We see about one of our war vessels in a year, here and there, but for a week. Old England keeps a strong fleet within striking distance always, and I have found in fifteen years of world wandering, that twenty-five per cent of our protection abroad

comes from the volunteer police of the seas, by stout old England, God bless her!"

And so Vinton was "squared" with his national official, and the hidden campaign was covered up. He was keeping faith with Drage in this innocent deception. He was saving Van Lennep, also; but, in concealing his romantic secret connection with Agathe the Serpent,—Howard Vinton felt that he was veiling the strange secret of a woman's heart.

"She is, after all, a woman," he sighed, "even if soiled and fallen, and so I will not unfold her tender moods to these social agnostics, Van Lennep and Fitzgerald. For she may choose to indulge in the pastime of guarding an innocent stranger from the drag-net of these Smyrna thugs."

He arranged with the consul to have all his possible newspaper communication handled by Willis, who gravely said: "There's twenty-five millions of Christian capital and five thousand dwellers here always in danger of any sudden Turkish storm of fury. Germany, Russia, France, Italy and England have a secret understanding that the nearest fleet shall always support the united foreign consuls.

"Bennett was wise to send you out here. Smyrna is the greatest port of the Levant, and from here you can strike out quickly and at once reach the centre of the storm disturbance.

"Meanwhile, drift quietly on your oars, and let me kill a bit of time with you. I will arrange with Fitz-

gerald, and we will divide the pleasant labour of showing you our local lions.

"Our private residences are always open to you—for we most rigorously exclude all the 'shady' citizens from our homes. We are perfectly safe in the consular private circle. But our open offices are continually haunted by the scum of the earth. Smyrna is a nest of robbers."

Howard Vinton found a pleasure in reporting to Paris his arrival at Smyrna, and he at once wrote to editor Walton to send all his mail to the American Consul, sealed, and marked "Official Business."

And so when reaching the Hotel Huck he felt that he was now fairly ready for the coming game of wits, and armed at all points. Sergeant Foley had arranged his private locks and bolts and a neat English-speaking "garçon" was on detail to answer the bell.

"We've nothing to do now but to browse about on the bay and watch for your big tramp boat. There's a blessing about blue water, it leaves no trail behind the keel.

"The two boat-tenders are on hand, and—there's the 'Eros' now, moored under our very window."

In the cool afternoon, Howard Vinton lounged on the upper portico, proudly "breaking in" his chibouque, testing Foley's well cooled Bass' ale, and watching the interminable shiftings of the colour panorama of Smyrna's great quay.

"We will 'take in' all the gardens and open-air the-

atres to-night, you and I," said Vinton, "and you can show me all the respectable ones! I want to write up this strange Levantine life—*al fresco*. Also, get me all the books which tell of the strange mishaps of this vast human hive five times born out of war or earthquake wreck."

Foley was a bit of a student, and he babbled on of the olden days of the Eolian city, of its Ionian successor,—of the days of Homer, and the "Homereum"—of the Lydian tyrants' sack and waste, of the splendid "New Smyrna" of Antigonos, of the legends of the Seven Churches, and the good meek Polycarp.

The old castle above them told of the days of the vanished Genoese chivalry, the splendid era of the Middle Ages, and the blue bay still showed the grove where Coeur de Lion once pitched his warrior tent in haughty pride. The twenty mosques, and the dismantled old fortress of Mons Pagus, spoke of the fierce Mohammedan swordsmen who hewed down cross and cross-bearer, and planted the cosmopolitan Devil's Auction of the Smyrna of to-day on the graves of Christian knight and slaughtered believer.

While Howard Vinton swept with his glass the blue bay far out to the far hovering horizon of the gulf in search of the great four-master, there was a ruddy-faced Briton fuming in a towering rage, on the steps of the Hotel Dunsford, at far away La Valette.

Captain Enos Drage was mopping his conical head with a huge red silk handkerchief, as he gazed down

at the point of St. Elmo. He had driven away the banded hotel porters in a fierce ebullition of wrath.

"No Athens steamer for four days," he growled, "and, by Jove! I should be now on the spot, to help that game young fellow! Here's Vinton telegraphing, and Jack Masterson, too, may have a vitally important report! The 'Cornaro' will reach Smyrna to-morrow. I wonder if I could get a boat, a yacht, or something? It is horrible!"

He glowered over the vast fortifications, down across the "Hog's Back," to where a splendid white three-masted steam yacht lay in the basin, with the Royal Yacht Club burgee floating at her mizzen. He had chafed in his enforced delay and had run over all the five quarters of the city, had hunted up his old garrison and club friends, roamed over the island, done the lions of the place, the governor's palace, the Cathedral of St. John, the caverns of the ghastly dead and dried monks, and had most liberally dispatched sundry gifts of coral and filagree to the sister he loved, as well as "The Child," who had written him a fervent letter, begging him "to join Howard Vinton, and—watch over him!"

Drage angrily turned. A burly jolly-faced Briton in tweeds and a pith had rudely disturbed "Shun Lee" Drage at his meditations by jostling him.

"Beg pardon! Good Gad! If it's not my old friend Drage!" cried the new-comer. "What are you doing out here?" But "Shun Lee" only stood bewildered.

"Hozier here! Well, I'll be shot if this isn't luck!

I thought I knew her rig! Is that the Lloyds' yacht 'Conqueror?' "

"Yes, old fellow! Come and take a cruise," heartily cried Colonel Angus Hozier, the general secretary of Lloyds' Association.

"Where are you stopping?" sharply cried Drage. "I've the most important business for you—and I need your boat?"

"Over at the Grand—come to breakfast! Here's my carriage," hospitably answered the second official of the great insurance league.

While they rattled along over the inclined causeways in a diabolical little trap, Drage jolted out his portentous secret, in concise fashion.

"Ah! This is grave news indeed!" said Hozier. "If you can break up that gang, my boy, your fortune is made forever. I'll send my man down on this trap to signal the boat, and we can have steam up and be off in three hours. I'll run you over to Athens, and send the boat back to you, from Salonique.

"I'm going on a month's hunt in Roumelia. With the 'Conqueror' you can dodge around, run into Scio, and then you can send it over to Smyrna, or, if these fellows try the old gigantic fraud business, you can reach Stamboul in thirty hours, London in three days more, and so head them off on their arrival!"

The two men discussed their breakfast, while Hozier made his own hurried plans for departure. "We can drive by, get your traps, and then make a break, as

soon as I see the 'blue peter' flying at the foremast of the 'Conqueror.'"

"I'm all right, now," joyously cried Enos Drage, as he threw down his knife and fork. "I will outwit or baffle those fellows, if I live."

"Enos, my friend," said the secretary, "I want you not to strike them—too soon. It will take them some little time to get in their cargo and plaster on their insurances!

"Let them fool along—you can easily watch them, get the whole game, and let them run into the trap! Don't flurry them! I want them to spend all the good money they will, for premiums, for bottomry, and expenses! Keep the yacht! You can dodge about—chase them over here to Malta! I'll go and see the Governor!

"We will have that steamer followed day by day to London Docks! I give you *carte-blanche* to run them down and expose the fraud! We will make them sick of it, and later blacklist every name on the policies.

"If you get the evidence—I'll go up from Salonique then and see our ambassador. We will trace out the Turkish scoundrels working with them, and afterwards make a clean sweep of the port officials of the pachalik of Smyrna!

"And every London agent, insurance broker and confederate shall be chased off 'change.' You know, the chief inspectorship is vacant."

"I'll follow the 'Alessandro Cornaro' to Iceland, but

"I'll show those villains up!" cried stern old Enos Drage.

"Here, send off this cipher telegram for me, through the Governor! You go to him! I'll meet you at the dock! The Consul at Smyrna will notify me at Athens, and here's another to my secret agent! We will soon have full reports on our arrival!"

The two men separated, and before sunset the beautiful "Conqueror" was hull down, on the course to Athens, gliding along at seventeen miles an hour.

That night, while Howard Vinton listened to the riot of pleasure's saturnalia in Emile Bouclair's rooms, he smiled in a grim defiance! "With the Minister and Lloyds' agent at Constantinople, Drage at Athens, Jack Masterson, Van Lennep and I here, we have got 'Komanos and Company' neatly sewed up! They celebrate too early in the game!"

Vinton had received the news of Captain Drage's flitting, and he fell asleep, to awake from troubled dreams with a start, for the song had died away, and the jewelled fingers of Agathe Mitis were waking the strains of the "Last Rose of Summer" again.

"It is Nicolo's last night ashore!" thought the American. "The 'Cornaro' will arrive to-morrow. Then the Serpent may, perhaps, have a leisure moment! Does she mean that I must remember?"

And he fell asleep, determined to spend the next day on the bay and see the giant tramp steamer steam into the bay. "I will give her a safe chance to tell me

the burden of her warning!" he muttered, as the music died away at last.

Morning came smiling over the Bos Dagh, the golden sunbeams driving away the mists of night and gilding the blue islands, hovering far out in the sapphire seas whence the foam-born Venus sprang. No hardy fisher, Suliote or Moslem, was earlier on the deep than Howard Vinton, who had decided to run far out beyond Vourla, and watch for the great four-master.

"This is something like life, Sergeant," cried Vinton, his hair streaming out in the fresh morning breeze. "Your 'Eros' is a racer!"

The good sergeant grinned as he held the tiller, the boat quivering as she raced along under the lift of the huge brown lateen sail.

A sturdy old stranded British tar held the sheet, while Vinton swept the varied shores and far reaching blue zone with his signal glasses.

The gossips of Smyrna had already decided that "Millor," the social recluse, was a haughty islander, who only deigned to visit "Her British Majesty's Consul," or else the swell officers of the fleet.

The fact that the young nobleman was travelling incognito, and only spoke English, explained his escorted tour of the village studded shores where a refined culture glowed at classic Philadelphia, two thousand years before the sober children of William Penn planted its drowsy namesake on the forest-fringed shores of the Schuylkill, in the New World.

The only companions "the lord" deigned to notice were the British and American Consuls.

"A walker, a sportsman, a yachtsman, a water dog, a world wanderer," said a gossiping Italian who watched the "Eros" flitting around the head of Smyrna Bay. Howard Vinton's cautious avoidance of new acquaintances was explained by his "lofty rank."

Even at the English Club, the two Consuls refrained from "showing off their lion." And quickly the effete hollow-eyed absinthe drinkers of the Hotel Huck's café decided that Vinton was only an aristocratic athlete and globe trotter.

A superficial report (by the bribed servants) as to Milord's personal outfitting confirmed a suspicion of literary tastes, for the apartment was now littered up with Vinton's guide books, the Consul's local library, and "Secretary Foley" was careful to leave some loose sheets of a "Memoir upon Polycarp's Martyrdom," to catch the passing eye. Photographs of old temple columns, the castle, the stadium, and the local scenes of interest gave an air of "studious refinement" to the rooms.

Already there was some murmuring among the gay soubrettes, dancing girls, and all the sirens of the fifty pleasure haunts that the young "Milord" was far too ascetic for either the climate or his social surroundings.

For "Laissez faire" is the easy motto of private life in Smyrna! And so, German, Spaniard, Italian, Greek, and Frenchman babbled on in easy insolence, in the

cool café of the Hotel Huck, ignoring the steady-eyed stranger who puffed his cheroot and calmly "took it all in," as the Yankees say. It was a trick of deportment which Howard Vinton had caught from the sly Russians who take the unwary at disadvantage in concealing their "gift of tongues" now and then!

The "Eros" had already dodged about the bay islands on two or three tacks. Howard Vinton's leap overboard had been duly admired by the veiled and shrouded Turkish women on a passing ferry-boat, and they had later run into a little cove near the outer fort, for luncheon, when Sergeant Foley waked Vinton out of a day dream.

The American's heart was far away at Southsea, and he was yearning for the letters which the fast Constantinople mail-boat must soon bring.

Here in the glowing Orient he longed for the cool streets of prim grey Southsea, where the umbrella of price and British cylinder had denoted the man of rank; where the calm English girl demurely casts down her eyes as the dashing army officer or solid naval hero steals a glance under her veil. Sober old Portsmouth, favourite marine city of bluff Henry VIII., has its romance all its own!

Stout-hearted Queen Bess fortified it, Brunel's genius lingers around it. Grim Nelson's august shade lingers there on the glory-hallowed deck of the old Victory; Collingwood and Napier are even household names, and the shrieking seamew sings the requiem of Kempenfelt

and his eight hundred men, who went down in the Royal George.

Still, in drowsy High Street, the stone walls of the "Spotted Dog" Inn are standing where mad Felton struck down the great Duke of Buckingham, the handsome "Steenie with the face of an angel," the careless courtier whose youthful smile bewitched the cold-hearted James—half pedant, half tyrant.

Rampart and battery, grim fort, proud steel clad tower, vast arsenal, the huge line of grim warships, the flitting uniforms of every branch of the service, speak of England's might, in its greatest naval stronghold, where loyalty shines in every eye, where the women are the wives, daughters, mothers, sisters, or brides-to-be, of heroes—and, where the tombstone speaks of the "bringing home of the warrior dead" from England's fields of blood, scattered around the world wherever its ensign has kissed the breeze.

Howard Vinton was dreaming, as he mused, of the unforgotten days of the past summer, and the eyes of sweet Lily Arnot were shining down upon him again in the mists of tender memory.

He started up as Foley cried, "There's a big tub of a four-master tramp coming up now from the sou'west, and here's the mail-boat away to the norrard!"

Vinton leaped to his feet. "Give me the glasses. Get all our things aboard. We must run out so we can head the four-master off. I want to get a good square look at her!"

In ten minutes the "Eros" was skimming along seaward, and an hour later the great lead-coloured freighter was boring along, her red sides gleaming like blood as she rolled about like a cork.

"That's the boat," said Foley, handing back the glass. "I see the white flag with its black circle and K—those chaps' private signal." Howard Vinton's heart beat quickly as he said: "Mind your tiller! Run right across her bows, and then luff and let me have a good look at her."

In five minutes they were near enough to read the name, "Alessandro Cornaro," in great black letters, on her high bows.

Only a few lazy men dawdled on her decks, and she laboured along like an overgrown sea monster in a grim silence.

"There goes up the Greek flag and her pilot signal," cried Foley.

"She's an ugly devil," muttered Vinton.

"Yes, and ugly devils, too, aboard of her!" cried Foley. "The straits of Malacca are snaky, but the Archipelago here is the last pirate nest of our times!"

There was a cluster of curious heads bobbing over the taffrail of the tramp, as Foley neatly scraped her bows, and as the "Eros" fell off, Howard Vinton saw, not a pistol shot away, Jack Masterson's grinning good-humoured face. A swarthy officer, glass in hand, stood on the quarter deck and, leaning over the rail at Mas-

terson's side was the red-faced old reprobate engineer, Sandy McGregor.

Vinton never raised a hand in recognition, and the "Eros" darted away toward the mouth of the mole, while the "Cornaro," in a great rounding sweep, stood far up Smyrna Bay to where fifty anchored barges were waiting, two leagues above the anchorage of the passenger steamers.

The "richest cargo that ever left the Levant" was already awaiting the rejuvenated old shell, which crawled along, high and empty, toward the barge anchorage.

"Put me ashore in front of the hotel as soon as you can now!" cried Vinton, for the mail steamer had swept by like a flash, and the "letters from England" were already his one object.

"I will go up to the British Consulate, Foley," earnestly said Vinton. "I won't risk Masterson coming to the hotel. I have my own reasons! You can look in three or four times in the early evening at the 'Scottish Arms.' You got a good look at Jack as he passed.

"Jack saw me very plainly—he will come to the 'Scottish Arms' the very moment he gets shore leave. Tell him to come at once to the British Consul's house, and ask for me! The servants will have word! I will wait there till midnight! Not a moment later. If he can't get off to-night, he will to-morrow! Do not be seen outside with Masterson! Don't take him to the Hotel Huck! I will come back in the carriage!"

The "Eros" swept up to the hotel sea wall, as the obedient Foley said, "Aye-aye, sir!" But Howard Vinton did not hear him, for a six-oared barge now swept past them, at a dashing pace.

Under the sun umbrellas, Vinton saw the gray smug face of the heavy-set French ex-convict, and Dimitri Nicolo's dark scowling beauty.

"Off for the 'Cornaro'!" divined Vinton. "Ah! Your play days are now over, Capitano Dimitri Nicolo! for there is your ark awaiting you, and the spider webs of Komanos and Company are all woven! I fancy that your burning eyes will turn eagerly toward the Hotel Huck, in your exile here on the bay, while your fellow scoundrel woos the fickle Agathe!"

The barge was only a speck up the blue bay, as Vinton clambered over the side of the "Eros" and was paddled up to the steps in front of the grand Hotel Huck.

The great four-master was already at anchor amid the fleet of barges, and a dozen boats were chasing the swift cutter of Emile Bouclair. A little steam launch with the Turkish crescent flag bobbed along, its tiny cabin resplendent with crimson fez-covered heads, and the flash of golden embroidery and silver-mounted scimeters told of the swarming customs and port officers.

"Where the carcass is,—there will be the crows, also," muttered Howard Vinton as he left Sergeant Foley in the little canoe, giving his orders for the night to the boatkeepers. The young American pushed through a

crowd of beggars, fruit-sellers, and lemonade peddlers, and threw up his hand to call a passing carriage.

The old rattle-trap lumbered up—one of the world's discarded equipages which in their days of ruin seem to be divided between Switzerland and the Orient. A tall, graceful woman, veiled in white and shrouded in the black Turkish gown, pushed smartly through the beggars and held a basket of flowers before him. In her right hand was a red rose!

Vinton started as the flower seller whispered, in English, "I saw your boat coming in from sea. They are both gone out to the steamer. It was my only chance. Come to-morrow morning at ten, alone, to the tower of the old castle, on the Pagus. I must see you,—for your life. Trust to me. Remember! Come alone! Or else, I will not speak! You are in mortal danger,—now go. But, drink no wine to-night at the hotel. I will watch over you. Trust to me!"

Vinton had mechanically grasped a bunch of the flowers and laid a ten piastre piece in the slender hand, covered with the flowing silver scarf. He silently nodded, and then sprang into the carriage.

When he dared at last to turn his head, the tall, graceful figure had darted across the mole to the side street of the great hotel.

The two sorry old jades were rattling down the mole, when Foley waved his hand from afar in token of his own departure for the Scottish Arms.

"Agathe the Serpent!" murmured the astonished

American. "A daylight masquerade at the risk of her life! Nicolo would surely poignard her—if he knew! And,—Bouclair! He would strangle her."

The British official's house was reached before Vinton had decided upon his course. "Is it a trap?" he mused, as he waited in the Consul's snugery for the dispatches and letters. "I can be armed to the teeth. Shall I take Foley? Dare I tell him? Or, perhaps, Jack Masterson?"

There was a generous thrill of manhood in Howard Vinton's heart. "I will take or leave her warning! But I will not trap her! She risks as much as I do!"

A packet of letters, brought in by Fitzgerald himself, brought more than the pale radiance of Southsea's sun into the American's heart. He was wrapped in the mantle of his delicious secret, as he absently answered the jolly official's queries.

For his own liberal use of Lily Arnot's stationery had evoked on her part a confidence which told him of all the gentle secrets of the blue-eyed English girl's heart. The tender words danced before his loving eyes and he longed for solitude to read the shy confession again and again.

But, before the Consul had thrown down the last "Times," as the mantel clock struck nine, the butler announced a visitor for the Consul's guest.

"Take him into the library," said Fitzgerald, "and tell him to come here freely, but,—for Heaven's sake, never to speak to you on the street, or even show up at

the Hotel Huck. He would soon be a 'floater,' if he were found out!"

It was midnight before Jack Masterson had finished his relation of the voyage. "The strangest thing is, that this chap Bouclair has ordered every soul off the vessel, but the Italian officers and old Sandy. I've got my quarters at the Scottish Arms. The men are a desperate gang, and they're all given a shore leave, and the Italian trattoria puts them up.

"The Turkish stevedores will load the ship. They've put their own Turkish watchers aboard. It looks as if they were going to monkey with the cargo some way. I won't have no show to tell you—for old Sandy told me not to come back to the ship. 'You've got a good lay, my boy, and I'll take you to London. Your pay and grub goes on. I'll chalk up your shore bill, but be sure to keep away from the boat till we make steam.' So, I'm just a gentleman of leisure."

A sudden thought struck Vinton. "Jack!" he said, "you know the old tower of the castle on the Pagus." The sailor nodded.

"Many a jolly lark I've had there."

"Then, for my life's sake, for our secret, get up there at nine to-morrow, with both your belt pistols. Hide inside the old castle. I'm coming there, alone—at ten sharp—to meet a woman. If you hear my revolver, run in and stand by; if you don't,—wait for me in the old castle yard and I will join you there alone.

You can have your own carriage drive over the hill and wait.

"I'll send mine away. You can watch out and see me come up the hill, but don't show yourself, unless you hear my pistol, till I come. If I don't join you by half past ten, come in there!"

"All right! Master Howard," said the sturdy Briton. "But you mind your eye! There's been many a man 'done up' there. Knives and scimetars make no noise!"

"I've got two good revolvers and my rifle cane!" smiled Vinton. "It's all right! I'll take the risk.—for—I've got to! And—silence to all about this! Not a word to Foley!"

Howard Vinton held out a ten-pound note. "Bless you!" said Jack. "Dear old 'Shun Lee' just stuffed me with money. I've more than I want,—and—" he chuckled, "I get a rattling good pay from these men! Now, I'll get the whole thing, bit by bit, out of Sandy McGregor; for he'll be off to-morrow for his grog and lay off at the Scottish Arms. He must never see us speak together.

"Foley don't matter, but they would throw me to the sharks, off Lipari, after they get under way. Whatever their game is, it's the run of a life!

"This devil Bouclair set up champagne for all hands, and, Dimitri Nicolo, the Greek cutthroat, is now in charge of the 'Cornaro.'

"There are fifty Turks tumbling the cargo in now. They just ballasted her enough to ride. The ballast goes out one side, as the cargo comes in at the other.

There's five hundred pipes of olive oil alongside now worth twenty pounds a pipe. That's their bottom layer.

"Now, I'll take a passing trap. Old Sandy may have come off with Bouclair. The captain's in command now. For God's sake, mind your eye! I'll be there, and ready to shoot, too!"

Vinton smiled. "Oh! It's a little matter of business!"

"Yes, I know it. A bright-eyed lass; a Smyrna devil!" mused Jack Masterson, as he rolled away. "Young men will be young men!" And he sighed, forgetting some palpable slips of his own past life!

But Howard Vinton carefully deposited in the Consul's steel safe the notes which he had made of Jack Masterson's disclosures, and before he alighted from the Consul's carriage at the Grand Hotel Huck, the telegraph key was clicking off the Consul's message to Athens, bearing tidings of grave moment to the anxious Captain Enos Drage.

Love was no part of Howard Vinton's pressing business at the Tower in the old castle. His heart was firmly anchored at Southsea.

There was no sound of revelry from Bouclair's apartments as Vinton strolled along the great hall of the second floor. To his surprise, the door of his apartment was ajar. He entered. The room was dark.

The quick spurt of a fusee showed him Foley lying outstretched on a Japanese lounge, motionless. Revolver in hand, the American then sprang to the dressing table and lit the tall candles.

The windows were closed. The room was in disorder. A claret bottle stood partly emptied on the table. A single glass was beside it. He leaned over the prostrate man and smelled his breath.

"Drunk! A soldier's failing!" With a hand on the man's heart, he found it beating faintly. "Fever! Heat fatigue!" he mused. And, then, Agathe's warning flashed over him!

"Drugged!" he softly said. "I'll make no outcry!" And he locked his door, and tearing off the man's upper raiment, sponged his breast and neck, liberally dosing him with sniffs of ammonia. The stout Foley was all right in an hour.

He feebly protested at the fumes of the life-giving hartshorn, and Mr. Howard Vinton, amateur nurse, listened in vain for any sounds from his romantic neighbours.

"This little job was probably meant for me! They didn't count on poor Foley's 'voyage of discovery,'" growled the American, as he watched the man at last coming slowly out of his dazed condition. "I think that Madame Agathe can give me the secret!" Vinton laughed as he noted the disordered room.

"They have surely rummaged it over, and—in

vain!" It came over him then that Foley by chance had tested the wine, and so had been an unwilling victim. "I'll just have Fitzgerald give me a good valet, also, one of his own retinue, and he can take another room. This time the trick has failed. They intended to search my effects or go further, if we both should be dosed. And, the poor fellow must have left the door unlocked. Some straggler may have done this. They counted on entering our room at night,—but, how?"

Howard Vinton drew a heavy lounge against the one door. He laid down upon it, revolver at hand, and awoke to find the greatly downcast Foley humbly regarding him in the early dawn.

"Not a word now!" whispered Vinton. "Dress as usual, get down to your breakfast, and order mine. Go out and signal for the boat. We'll take a freshener, and then you can tell me all. Are you all right now?"

"Just a bit stupid, sir!" the abashed sergeant said. "They loaded up the wine on me. I'll be soon all right, with the salt breeze. It was a shabby trick!" he growled.

Mr. Howard Vinton watched with a peculiar smile the departure of Emile Bouclair's cutter at eight o'clock for the "Alessandro Cornaro."

"I've changed my mind, Sergeant," he shortly said. "You can go and take a race around the bay. I'll be back here at noon,—and,—remember, do not mention

your adventure. But, be sure to touch nothing in our rooms. Not even the hotel water!

"I'll meet you here,—at noon. If I'm not here, then you must take a trap and come to the Consulate."

When the boat was well off shore, Howard Vinton took a carriage and drove slowly up the road to the old castle, armed and watchful.

BOOK II.

IN THE TOILS.

CHAPTER VI.

AT GIBRALTAR! THE MAN WHO WAS LEFT AT MALTA.

THE alert young American had taken the precaution to run into the English Club and get a reliable driver and an excellent team selected by the chief steward.

"This man is steady, well armed and experienced! Consul Fitzgerald uses him to transport the official mail bags. You can rely on him, my Lord," the honest steward said. "It's a spookish place up there!" Howard Vinton smiled faintly and tossed the Club steward a Turkish guinea.

"It costs a little to be a lord, but—it pays!" mused Vinton as the team briskly trotted along out past the alabaster mosque, on skirting the great cypress cemetery clasped in the bosom of the great growing city.

His yachting glasses were at hand, and as he halted half way up the two-thousand-foot hill of Mons Pagus he saw a trap driving briskly away from the great ob-

long castle above him and disappear over the hill to the south. "There's Jack Masterson already. I hope he is not tipsy like the genial Foley. He might spoil all. I suppose Foley celebrated his meeting with Jack." He had sternly forbidden the repentant sergeant from all unwary experimenting upon the wines in the apartment in future.

In an hour, the carriage reached the western spur of the hill, on which the battlemented watch tower of the old castle stood. Quickly levelling his glasses, Vinton saw a common droschky of the street crawling up the road after him, and the black shrouded form of a Turkish woman, her silver veil shining out, was the only occupant.

"Ah! There comes the Lady of the Red Rose!" he cried, with a strangely beating heart. And then, he suddenly became aware of the splendid facilities for hide and seek provided by the customs of Mohammedan female disguise.

"It's a sword that cuts both ways," he laughed. "See here, Abdallah," he said to the driver. "Drive your horses over into the shade, behind the tower. Tie them. If you hear any outcry or firing in the tower you can come in to my aid; otherwise wait there till I join you."

Abdallah grinned. He was the factotum of all the gay young English and American officers, and he had often seen many a veiled Fatima keep her willing tryst at the old Genoese castle whence the crusaders once

eagerly descended to skilfully transfix the Paynim on their lances.

But Howard Vinton was now sweeping the blue bay with his signal glasses. There was a cloud of busy barges hovering around the giant tramp, and no smoke poured from the funnels of the "Alessandro Cornaro."

Scattered over the tranquil bay were several puffing tugs with long linked lines of barges dragging inertly along, in the direction of the tramp steamer. "They are chucking in the cargo at a lively rate!" he mused, for the huge booms were swinging out from the three forward masts, and the deck was clustered with turbaned stevedores.

A single moment he enjoyed the superb panorama of Smyrna Bay,—the vast city dreaming below him on the south shore,—the railway skirting the blue waters to the east,—far out to the west the enchanted islands of the Greek sea lay. Across the bay to the north the beautiful summer villages were spread out.

The huge fort on its island rocky mole lay far away to the west, its six great Krupps gleaming black and ugly. The blood-red flag waved there, the sentinels' bayonets flashed in the sun, and the singing bugle rang out in defiance from the great English warships, swimming between blue sea and pale apple-green sky, almost at his feet. Glancing to the south and east the fruitful plains of the rich pachalik of Smyrna swept away into the picturesque mountain valleys of the

province of Anatolia, the richest jewel of the Turkish crown.

But, a moment he dreamed, as the rattle of wheels awakened him. He strode on to the door of the old square keep. Forty feet square and a hundred and fifty high, its gaping windows were grinning like sightless eyes. A high double curtain wall led along to the main rectangle of the old castle, whose deserted battlements and crenelated towers were silently crumbling to ruin. A vast walled enclosure to the east had sheltered the charges of the garrison in the olden days.

There was a half light in the interior, and with his cocked revolver in hand, Vinton explored every corner. Bending down at the door leading out to the covered way joining the western tower and the old castle, built along the spinal ridge, Vinton recognised Jack Master-son, standing ready under the old grand entrance. He was now ashamed of his fears, as the doorway was darkened but for a moment.

Throwing off her veil, Agathe Mitis stood there revealed in all her glowing beauty!

"You have done well, my Lord," she gasped, as blushes deepened the crimson on her cheeks. "You may yet be saved! Now, listen to me, and,—leave Smyrna at once. The captain of the 'Apollo' has told all of your rank and your enormous wealth! There is a plot to capture you while in your boat out on the bay, and then to run you over to the keeping of the

Greek bandits behind Athens. There you will be held for an enormous ransom, and be tortured,—perhaps, killed!

“The town is now filled with dangerous men. Do not go out of the reach of the warships and the English Consul. You are watched every single moment. The hotel rooms you use have been entered and searched!

“They wished to get at your private papers and find out about your letter of credit. The wine was drugged for you both last night. Ask me not how I know. I do know! And the poor secretary left the key in the door. Impressions of it have been taken. Duplicates will be made. They are enraged now, for they found nothing. You stayed out very late last night. If you had both drank of the wine, then, lowered insensible out of a side window, you would have been carried down to the mole. If your valuables were on your person, you would perhaps have been cast into the sea out beyond the fort, like poor Robinson.

“Ah! It was awful! The tide swept him back—a dead witness, after many days. If you could be ensnared, on the outskirts, you might perhaps be hidden in the interior, and then tortured till you drew your letter of credit funds,—then, after being dosed with some memory-killing poison, you might be held for a great reward or a humbug rescue effected. Linger not in Smyrna!”

The poor woman glanced in terror at the doors and

windows, as she shuddered. "I must go! I would be strangled if they knew!"

Vinton spoke kindly to the frightened dancer. "Why do they seek my life?" he said, his anger rising at the cowardly plot.

"Because you are an English Lord, and,—vastly rich. Be warned! You should go over to Athens, or else take the Russian steamer to Alexandria!" And she wept, trembling as she plead with the secret agent of Lloyds.

"Who are they, these men?" he cautiously asked.

"Alas! I dare not tell you. There is a desperate gang here,—merchants,—officials,—Greek bandits,—gamblers,—European women,—all are secretly united, and one devil is at the head, who never spared either man nor woman! Now, remember! If you heed not my warning, I shall still watch over you, but, go—go at once, I beg!"

And she grasped his arms in all the energy of a woman's despair.

"I dare not tell you more. They are going to have secret meetings every night now. I will be watched, and I may not have the chance to see you soon again. Never notice me! I will find the way. You are an Englishman. I was so happy once in England. I have lived under your flag. It was the fatal cholera that carried off the man whom I once loved, and that misfortune left me stranded here among these villains. He

was an Englishman; a noble heart, and I would save you now for his sake."

As she spoke a shrill whistle was heard, and then, swiftly as the antelope leaps away from the cheetah, the dark-eyed Agathe fled, her face covered in the silvery Moslem veil.

Howard Vinton sprang out of the nearest window, alighting on the grassy turf. He saw the driver lashing his horses down the road and Agathe was soon hidden by the crest of a little valley sweeping to the south. Springing along the old covered way he joined the anxious Jack Masterson, and the two, without a word, concealed themselves in the dark corner of an old groined arch.

"All right now, Jack!" cheerily cried Vinton. "There are a lot of sight-seers nearing the place. Slip out and send your own carriage home down the road. The driver must not see me. Then join me here. My carriage is over there behind yonder wall.

"I wish you to drive me down to the Consul's house, by the east end of the town, and you must get there as soon as you can," the young man ordered.

In ten minutes, the American and the sturdy engineer were far away over the eastern crest of Pagus, trotting along, out of sight of all prying eyes. "What's my lay now?" demanded Jack, as they rode along, their heavy revolvers ready for instant use.

"I wish you to be just as agreeable a host as possible to old McGregor, the chief. Come up to the consulate

every day and ask for letters. The secretary will tell you when I need to see you in the evening. Find out all you can, in every way. It will take a month to load this boat. I want to be cautious with Mc, the engineer. Let him tell you, bit by bit, his story. Never recognise me. You might as well find out how long before the 'Cornaro' will sail. You can run over to Athens and spend a week with Captain Drage, and get all his secret instructions. Then come back here for the London run.

"Now, when we strike the east end of the city, you can jump out and take your way back to the Scottish Arms, by the first trap." It was an hour after Howard Vinton had safely reached the consulate before he had resolved upon his future course. "It is clear that they do not suspect my real character. And the danger,—such as it is,—is one that I can both face and avoid."

Vinton could not bring himself to expose the brave Agathe to the danger of any future reprisals. "I'll not tell Fitzgerald,—nor even Van Lennep, but I will hang on and hold the fort. If I make any sudden departure, or change my habits, this poor woman may perhaps suffer for her strange generosity of conduct. There is always safety in numbers! I will get an extra man from Fitzgerald and, so, either Foley or he can be every moment in the room. The suburbs I will avoid save under escort, and I can either vary my habits and sleep aboard the corvette, on the pretext of the cool-

ness, or fall gradually into the habit of using a room at Fitzgerald's. At the table d'hôte I am safe! The English Club is near, and with this roving plan I can be in and out of my rooms at all hours. Perhaps the little feud between Bouclair and Nicolo may come to a head when the 'Alessandro Cornaro' sails. It is clear that Captain Dimitri Nicolo may not care to leave this pretty woman to the tender mercies of that brute Bouclair."

And the young secret agent decided to confine his future excursions on the "Eros" to box-hauling about the bay, well out of range of the "Cornaro" and to keep always in sight of the vessels of the English fleet.

"I must stay here at the Grand Hotel Huck until the vessel sails," he decided, at last. "By that time Van Lennep will have all these financial operations pretty well plotted out, and they must at once insure, either here, or in Constantinople—or London. There are a thousand agents available to watch them. Consul Fitzgerald has a key to the proposed swindle, in all the consular invoices. If there is a tragedy of the sea to come, it will be located probably between Malta and Gibraltar. Old 'Shun Lee' will be off on the chase, the very moment the boat sails. If Van Lennep covers up his own tracks, I am about the only one of the party left in any danger. When we have let them into the trap, I will quietly establish myself at the Consulate. Then, on the first war vessel, I can be off for Malta, or Constantinople, and I can go home and transact 'that

little bit of business' at Southsea." And so Howard Vinton determined to stick to his guns!

When a few days later, Fitzgerald, Van Lennep and Howard Vinton held a council of war, there was a vast change in the appearance of the great steamer "Alessandro Cornaro."

Her red sheathing was no longer visible, she was deep in the water, and the unexampled activity of the swarming stevedores convulsed the sleepy town of Smyrna. There was still the same great swarm of barges around her, with a dozen small anchored craft waiting to aid her in loading her down to the Plimsoll line.

Feluccas, scows, an old brig or two, and Greek boats had been gathered in from the Dardanelles and Salonique. Vinton's face grew grave as Van Lennep frankly explained that he was baffled.

"Beyond knowing that a half dozen secret meetings of the old 'Komanos and Company' gang have taken place, and that Bouclair has held a couple of big jollifications in the Hotel Huck, there is not a sign of the real intentions of these fellows. They have not applied here as yet for a single dollar of insurance, and the whole town agrees that the cargo is the richest—by far the richest,—which ever left the Levant. But they must give a sign soon. They won't sail without covering all with insurance. She will be loaded in ten days, unless they mean to break her in two right here at the anchorage."

The sad-eyed German was depressed. "I have hardly anything to report to Captain Drage at Athens." Both the older men were now surprised at Howard Vinton's calmness.

He had not chosen to speak to them of the sudden disappearance of Jack Masterson who had carried a budget of secret details stored up in his mind, when he slipped away to the Piraeus on an available Italian boat.

"You have not been able to gain any news, Vinton?" demanded the Consul. Howard shook his head.

"My room has not been left alone for a moment since Foley was overcome by temptation," he smiled.

"I have listened to the chatter of the three dozen who ornament the table d'hôte of the Hotel Huck. Though they rattle away in German, French and Italian, there has never been one suspicious word. But five or six of these fellows vary the monotony by dining in Bouclair's rooms, and there's a stream of messengers, — zaptiehs, — soldiers, — officers, — dervishes and high-grade Turks always running in and out of his rooms. Their private business is probably transacted there.

"Captain Nicolo has never left his ship since the hatches were opened. I have seen the handsome woman of the conspiracy frequently going off to the ship in company with Bouclair. As for my own boat trips on the bay, I have only learned by ocular proof that the crew are all back on board, and they are getting all 'in ship shape' for sailing."

"Yes!" said Van Lennep, "and the coaling has been going on simultaneously. I expect to awake some morning and find that the 'Cornaro' has slipped out of the harbour and vanished in the night!"

Consul Fitzgerald mused over a paper in his hand. "It is incomprehensible that we cannot pierce their lines. Here is the cargo on board, roughly jotted up from the Consular invoices as now certified. It is a floating fortune." He read off the items:

"Five hundred cases opium, three hundred tons of olive oil (five hundred pipes), three hundred tons of valonia, five thousand sacks dried figs, three thousand boxes seedless raisins, forty thousand half-boxes Sultana raisins, thirty-five hundred packages 'sultanines,' and some smaller items.

"It is a tremendous mass of property!" he mused, "to be entrusted to these scoundrels. And what in God's name will 'Komanos and Company' do with it?" the sad-eyed Van Lennep gruffly answered:

"Run away with it! Steal it by fraudulent bankruptcy! Burn it,—sink it,—anything but pay for it!"

"But who gives these fellows such a cargo?" persisted the bluff English official.

"Well! They have scraped the whole coast from Salonique to the Dardanelles. From Chios,—Aleppos—and Smyrna, over to Candia. It is beyond my ken," the local agent of Lloyds answered.

"I have swarms of insurance brokers who have been watching my office to see the first applications for in-

surance, and not one has appeared. Either they are delaying, or else there is some new plan which is to me a mystery."

"It may be they will try the foreign companies," gravely suggested the Consul. "Not a policy has been applied for, my colleagues tell me," said Van Lennep. "And the ship,—her ownership,—her destination,—and the whole affair, is a daily growing mystery. This gigantic consignment is sufficient to break the London market down to a starvation point!" the watchful German said. "I have tried to do my duty, but here I am powerless—there seems to be left no duty to do!"

"Some giant speculation with its headquarters in London. Some desire to slyly corner the market," suggested Fitzgerald. "Hardly possible! The sailing will be duly telegraphed, and it will take three weeks for this vessel to reach the Thames, unless she founders in the Bay of Biscay."

"Well! my friends! Old Captain Drage is ready to follow her with the swift 'Conqueror.' A stern chase is a long one, but the only thing to do here is to run her down, from port to port, on her voyage, and then secretly dog her from her anchorage to the London Docks."

There was little to reward the men who watched the lynx-eyed scoundrels operating behind the masterly intelligence of Emile Bouclair. Howard Vinton was nonplussed and only awaited the return of Jack Master-son to receive the opinion of "Shun Lee Drage," who

was panting to chase the mysterious vessel to her final destination.

As Vinton rode back to the hotel he wondered at the singular silence of Agathe the Serpent. Several times he had met Bouclair face to face in the hall. The astute Frenchman's calm face never gave a sign of the existence of the haughty stranger "Milord," who was now well known to be a man of peculiarly eccentric habits of retirement. Once only Vinton caught a flash from Agathe Mitis' eyes as she went down the broad stair with the watchful Bouclair.

It was easy to verify that the dancer only went abroad now under Bouclair's escort. There had been no more suspicious meddling with "Milord" Vinton's apartments.

On this particular night it flashed over the American's mind that Agathe, herself, was under suspicion. "Does he suspect her from jealousy, or wish to prevent some private arrangement between Nicolo and the Greek beauty? I'll set Jack Masterson on to watch!"

There was a growing evidence of the haste to dispatch the now deeply loaded "Alessandro Cornaro" when all the barges disappeared from her sides. Dozens of little provision boats hovered around her, and Van Lennep was hawk-eyed in his daily watch of the Turkish Customs offices.

"Her papers are all 'en règle' now, clearance,—manifest, and all are ready," whispered Van Lennep as he met Vinton, by chance, in a lonely place. "Waiting

only for orders from London. I have already telegraphed it to Captain Drage."

Vinton hastened on to a meeting with honest Jack Masterson, who had hidden himself in an humble restaurant, and sent a messenger for his fellow agent.

"Here you are!" cried Masterson. "I'm off to the boat. They are going to turn the engines over. I've got all my own orders from Captain Enos. I'm to get left at Malta, as if by accident, and then to telegraph fully to him, and also post the agent of Lloyds' there; then I can easily get on to Gibraltar ahead of the 'Cornaro' and join her again there. She'll be watched every mile as far as Gibraltar by the 'Conqueror.' My! what a beauty! That yacht can run three miles to the 'Cornaro's' one."

Howard Vinton then eagerly unfolded to Jack Masterson the past quarrel of the two scoundrels over Agathe the Serpent. "I have an idea that the beautiful young woman wants to give Mr. Emile Bouclair the slip, and then run off with her lover Nicolo, on the boat. Watch both her and the captain and post me," said the anxious American who unfolded all his orders.

"Just as I thought!" he growled. "I am to remain quietly here—after the boat sails, and not to leave till I get a positive order from London or from Drage himself. He fears that Van Lennep might be sacrificed if I betrayed the secret watch, by following the departing boat."

"See here!" said Masterson. "Old McPherson of

the Scottish Arms is to send a boat off to McGregor, and me, with our mess goods. I'll send back a letter to you by the man, to be left on your boat here,—the 'Eros.' The Scottish Arms host is all right,—we are doing a bit of smuggling for him. But never dare to mention my name. I'll post you about the pretty woman and the two rivals."

"You must not fail me, Jack!" gravely said the American. "You know how much Captain Drage depends on you and me. There's a fortune for him, depending on the use of our wits and,—more than a fortune,—to me!"

"Bless your stars! How easy!" said the engineer. "It's true we are almost ready to sail. But I have to have a day's notice to get my stoker's gang together and charge the fires. There's nothing here that can tow us out of the harbour. You can keep Sergeant Foley on watch, to see the first smoke from our stacks. Your consul friend and Van Lennep can have their spies all out. Now, post your two boatkeepers on the 'Eros' to watch every movement of the 'Cornaro' night and day, and give them a good night glass. We will be all lit up, even if we run out at night. One of the men can then paddle off in the skiff and rouse you, and so you can be on the 'Eros' when my messenger comes.

"I know that I will not be allowed to leave the 'Cornaro' after we get our orders to sail, and the Turkish officials seal up the hatches. But, you must

post Captain Drage at the Piraeus at once, by cipher telegram. He will stand up and down across the channel between Andra and Nicaria. I've drawn the rig and given him all the boat's signals, her number and her colours. I quietly stole the whole information. Once sighting her, he will run on ahead to Cerigo and stand across by Cerigotto to Candia,—then he will bear away, on a rambling yacht course, and keep her always in sight to Malta. He'll hear from me there. There's a dozen steamers a week to Marseilles, and he can strike London a week before we get there.

"The 'Conqueror' will follow the 'Alessandro Cornaro' to Gibraltar, and Hozier has already sent his dispatches to every Spanish and Portuguese port! But I'll get you the last news, and you be out in your boat on the watch. It's my last chance to help you, for, by God, Nicolo would have me knifed and thrown overboard if he suspected! He is a desperate scoundrel, and he, too, has had it hot and heavy with old Bouclair. I see now that they are quarrelling about the woman! And she isn't worth it! Keep your eyes on her. She may give the trick away!"

"All right, Jack," heartily said Howard Vinton; "but, you must keep your own weather eye open! For God's sake don't drink while you are aboard!"

"I know what I'm risking," said the bluff old engineer, as he significantly drew his hand across his throat.

"How far are you coaled?" Vinton demanded.

"Only to Gibraltar," the sailor answered. "They've stuffed her so full of cargo, we have to lay two or three days at Gibraltar for coal.

"Now, it's a shake and break away," said Jack. "I feel it in my bones that they won't let me off the ship after this—and I've got the excuse to have old Sandy send my kit aboard. I'll do my best for you and 'Shun Lee,' as well as 'Mary Horton.'"

"No use to hope for a pointer from old McGregor! He told me that this was his last run, and he is in to make a snug berth for himself, and while he will protect me, he will not give up the swindle! They 'wouldn't let him know till the last minute, anyway.' There's been a couple of dozen of these beach combers counselling on board in the big cabin, by the hour, with Nicolo and Bouclair. They are Greeks, low Italians, Armenians, Turkish merchants, and a lot of them gold-laced fellows! Lord! They're a nasty lot! Now, I'm off. Look out for your own life! It's a regular devil's den here!"

Howard Vinton wandered about the bazaars for a couple of hours and cautiously regained his hotel. There was no sign of hope in the sad-eyed Van Lennep's face as the three friends met around Fitzgerald's table.

"If we can only find out their game, it will be only after the 'Cornaro' sails," declared the mystified German. "There's not a dollar of insurance placed here upon her, and the foreign brokers are watching my every movement. I find that heavy drafts have been drawn

against Sassoon & Company of London against the bulk of the opium, and some very considerable advances have been made through 'Schnorr & Co.' of Cadogan Buildings, London. What they are waiting for here, I don't know! Time alone will tell. I have my own spies watching night and day! I will call our little circle together the very moment she moves, and then we can beat the 'tramp' as far as Athens and Malta with our telegraphed messages! We have done our whole duty! And now let us all be quiescent till she sails! We must not alarm them!"

And then, Howard Vinton found life at Smyrna a wearisome drag. His watch in the "Eros," with the eager Sergeant Foley, were on duty day and night. The American systematically plotted out the city and explored all its quaint attractions day by day as the heavy hours crawled away. He marvelled at the silence of Agathe, his self-constituted guardian, until his watchers reported that she went off daily to the "Cornaro" in Bouclair's cutter; but now she was always under the escort of a forbidding-looking Turkish woman.

"So, he suspects the bird of passage!" mused Vinton. "Is he afraid that she will run away, or is there some secret that she might divulge?" For, the stolid Frenchman himself carefully received her every evening at the boat steps. "She never will be able to give this watchful brute the slip," decided the American, who had at last realised that Bouclair probably held Agathe the

Serpent as a hostage for Dimitri Nicolo's "faithful performance of his duties!"

In the consular carriage, rolling along the mole, Howard Vinton had anxiously noted the smoke from the "Cornaro's" stacks, indicating the machinery trials. And the jolly face of Jack Masterson beamed out no more at the "Scottish Arms."

"It is strange," said Van Lennep, after a long week's delay had elapsed, "none of the crew are allowed to quit the ship even for a moment! And still she does not go! I have one fellow who is getting rich on my bribes, and he tells me the 'order to pass the forts' is all signed and ready, waiting only for Bouclair's demand."

"And there's not a single pound of insurance taken out on her here! The drafts and bills of lading are all in London now." "Then, they have effected heavy insurances outside of our local lines!" gravely said the Consul. "I have given Captain Drage a daily report 'Still here.' The moment she sails you must come here, Vinton, and then notify him through me, so that the 'Conqueror' can dog the voyage. There is mischief lurking in their every movement!"

Mr. Howard Vinton had recurred to his journalistic duties sufficiently to keep up an active report to Walton at Paris as to all the shifting problems of Armenia, and the American Consul often chuckled as he sent off lengthy telegrams in Bennett's handy cipher.

"There's something strange about the wires, my

boy," he said to the pseudo lord. "This fellow Bouclair here has been piling up the telegrams in the last week, and he has even used all "Reuter's" facilities, and the 'Agence Havas,' here! He has been going it blind, too, on Trieste, Paris and London! I'll tell you—there's something very snaky up! I've been watching this 'Alessandro Cornaro,' and somebody is either going to be a money king or else go to the wall! They are cornering the London market in some vast speculation! Nobody knows who is at the end of anything here; but I can get all your press dispatches through finally."

Vinton relieved his mind by telegraphing this news to the anxious old captain, chafing on the yacht "Conqueror," and now lying with banked fires in the snug harbour of the Porto Drakoni.

He had "used up" all the stationery which Miss Lily Arnot kindly provided, and he poured out his loneliness on this particular evening in fervent dispatches. Long he sat on the cool balcony, watching the yellow masthead lights of the "Cornaro" shimmering out over the silent waters of Smyrna Bay. He was worn and wearied with the bootless quest.

"If they don't go soon, then I will," he swore in a sudden disgust. "For some fellow of H. B. M. service will be artfully moving on to the storm of 'The Child's' heart, under the mighty shield of Miss Lavinia." He was about to enter his rooms when the sound of a bitter altercation reached him.

There was no mistaking a woman's passionate reproaches and a man's cold brutality.

"People who wrangle should shut their windows," he mused, and then, with a start, he realised that the quarrel was in Bouclair's splendid corner rooms. He rose, and entering his own bed-room, leaned out and closed his own windows.

The sound of oaths and sobbing was his last observation. "Foolish that I never noticed that!" he said, as he now noted a broad ledge of masonry nearly a foot wide connecting the two galleries. "Anyone could easily slip around there, and so come in and cut my throat! I think that I will carefully look to my hooks and bars!" And long after he lay down to rest the bitter struggle of woman's desperation and man's inhumanity went on!

"It's about the handsome Greek captain," he murmured, as he fell into a confused medley of vain dreams. But no shadows of the night clung to him when he was softly roused by Sergeant Foley.

"Dress yourself, sir!" the soldier whispered. "There's great clouds of smoke now pouring out of the funnels of the tramp. I'll be bail that they are off this morning!" Howard Vinton was soon on his feet and ready in a moment.

"Slip out quietly and have my boat made ready," he said. "Then get away and warn Mr. Van Lennep. Come back to me here—I will wait here—and we will take our coffee as usual. I'll have the valet strictly

watch the rooms! I'll keep an eye, too, on Bouclair, and you must watch over this woman! I fancy there may be some trouble here! They quarrelled all the night. Tell Van Lennep to put his own man on watch, and follow Bouclair to the Customs House!"

Throwing open his windows, to his inexpressible delight the American saw the great black clouds rising over the "Cornaro" and drifting away eastward, leaving long opaque shades on the dancing blue waters! Seated there alone, his eyes strained upon the ship, his glasses told him of the bustle of departure. And then the sounds of hurry and loud voices in the next rooms were audible, as it was evident that Monsieur Emile Bouclair was energetically preparing for a very busy day. When Howard Vinton descended to the coffee room he saw Emile Bouclair at the front door, and in an earnest converse with the Turkish woman who had been for two weeks Agathe Mitis' jailer.

"Ah! Final orders, I suppose!" he mused, as the old woman nodded and mounted the stair.

Bouclair sprang into a waiting carriage, and as Vinton strolled along to the front door he saw a triangular fleet of little boats speeding off to the huge "Alessandro Cornaro."

"It's a go, sure enough!" said the gleeful Yankee, as he exchanged a word with Foley. "All right," the Sergeant whispered. "Van Lennep is on Bouclair's track! The boat is ready!"

"Then, watch the room above," said Vinton; "I'll

keep my own eye on the 'Cornaro' here from the breakfast room! If she moves out, then you get to the Consul with my dispatch, and join me later in the boat. We will watch for you here at the steps!" He slipped the paper in the Sergeant's hand.

The American had hardly broken his roll and swallowed a hasty cup of coffee when he saw the huge "Cornaro" swinging slowly around and beginning a great circle to place her long keel in the central line of the deepest channel. A smart steam launch flying the port officer's flag dashed out along the mole, and Monsieur Emile Bouclair's pith helmet and green-lined sun umbrella shone out gaily there above the red fezzes of the lolling Turkish officers.

The launch sped away up to the east to cut off the great steamship on her outward way. "Last orders!" laughed Vinton, as the launch sped on. The little boats were already pulling homeward.

But the American's laugh ceased as through the open door of the *café* he saw Agathe the Serpent, muffled in her Turkish disguise, glide swiftly out of the great hall of the Hotel Huck!

In a moment, the alert Yankee was on her trail! He sauntered easily out of the house and then rapidly followed the swiftly gliding form of Agathe to the boat landing, hidden from view of the Hotel Huck by the tall Custom House, reaching out on the long mole. When Vinton reached the western side of the mole the

little Greek girl had leaped into a little cutter, and already the leg of mutton sail was loosened.

Two athletic Greeks in long red bonnets were sweeping the boat around the end of the mole.

In a moment the light bark was skimming down the bay like a sea hawk! "Stole away, by heavens!" cried Vinton. "There'll be the devil to pay now!" With a swift premonition of coming trouble Howard Vinton hastened back to the hotel.

"I can see the 'Cornaro' till she is out at sea, past the fort, from my own balcony!" With a beating heart he watched the deeply-laden leviathan crawl slowly along past the city front, and then he nervously turned the glasses toward the Greek fisher boat, now a league down the bay, far out in the centre of the gulf.

"I wonder if Agathe has made a daring escape, or—did her jealous lover plan this joke on Monsieur Emile Bouclair? It's a bit of woman wit!"

And then, as the great steamer forged along, the customs launch with Bouclair dropped its towline and leisurely proceeded toward the customs mole.

"Ah! The pretty jade!" laughed Vinton, as the Greek fisher boat ran directly out into the channel, lying drifting in the onward path of the tramp steamer.

"They will pick her up, hoist the companion way, and Bouclair is left in the lurch!" But his face grew white as the launch with the bloody crescent now shot along directly toward the mole, ploughing up the foam, and was racing along at a terrific rate of speed.

"God of heavens! He sees through the trick! They will pursue the freighter!" Howard Vinton hastened to leave his exposed position, for Sergeant Foley was hastily signaling from the "Eros."

The young American quickly ran to his room and bade the valet lock all the doors and wait inside on guard until his return.

"There's a devil of a racket next door, sir," he reported. "They have carried someone down stairs almost dead."

"Hasten, and find out from the *maître d'hôtel!*" cried Vinton. "Be prudent! Quick, now!" and he sat, with his revolver ready at hand, when the valet ran back up stairs.

"It's the old Turkish woman—bound and gagged, and almost choked to death! The pretty Greek has cleared out!"

"Here! I must get out! Remember, open these doors to no one! Watch me in the boat from the windows!"

A glance showed Vinton the Turkish launch sweeping up to the mole, and a league below the town the lateen sail of the fisher boat was shining alongside the 'Alessandro Cornaro.'

"Safe, by God!" cried Vinton, as the fisher boat fell off and the huge four-master swung along on her way, the white churned foam glittering behind her.

"Nothing can catch her now," he gayly said, as the black clouds rose denser from her funnels. "Hurrah for Nicolo!" and with a composed face he sauntered down to the boat landing.

There was a row-boat nearing the "Eros," and Sergeant Foley was ready at the slips in the skiff. "Hasten! Put me on board at once! I want to run down the channel!" Vinton sharply ordered, but as he sank back in the skiff the boom of a heavy gun at the outer fort drew excited crowds to the windows of the houses and the end of wharf and quay!

"The devil!" gasped Vinton. "They have telegraphed down to the fort and stopped the 'Cornaro' with a gun!" He was on the deck of the "Eros" as the row-boat glided past, and a man handed him a newspaper rolled up, without a word.

"Cast off and stand up the bay easily, where we can see the channel, Foley!" cried Vinton. "We may be watched. Just knock around the city front, and don't pass the line of the mole! Bouclair will be after that boat in a few minutes!" And then Howard Vinton unrolled the bundle. In Jack Masterson's scrawling hand he read:

"Off for Malta—for orders. We are to pick up the woman beyond the fort! A neat trick! I overheard Bouclair's last directions. Cargo is insured for sixty-five thousand pounds in London; boat for thirty-five. Twenty consignees of cargo, mostly 'Schnorr and Co.' and nearly all the opium goes to 'Sassoon and Co.' They've drawn already enormous advances and have insured up to the limit through their London agents. We get our orders at Malta. Look out for the trick between there and 'Gib.' Burn this and cable to Captain

Drage, so he can warn all the London people. *It's to be either by fire or water.* I don't know which!"

In ten minutes, the "Eros" lay at the mole near the English Consulate. Howard Vinton jumped ashore and his fingers flew over the lines as he penned the warning telegram to "Shun Lee" Drage.

"For God's sake, put that through at once, Fitzgerald!" he cried. "Send it to the British Consul and to Drage at Piraeus, and wait at the office for the Consul's answer that Drage has received it. I will knock around on the bay and see this boat go off!"

"Depend on me," said the official. "Van Lennep is following down the shore line in his own launch, and he will send his own dispatches to Drage and to London. Just you keep cool and keep away from here to-day. We have them trapped now, for at the first sign of any crookedness we will cable and have all the policies cancelled; but that must be done by old Enos! It would be the death sentence of anyone here! It's Enos Drage and Lloyds now against Dimitri Nicolo and old Sandy McGregor! For Bouclair's work is all done, and 'Komanos and Company' have a book which stands to win or lose over a hundred thousand pounds! For God's sake, be cool and careful to-day!"

Howard Vinton nodded grimly, and hastening to his boat ran out and around the British fleet. Curious Jack tars were watching a heavy tug sweeping down the bay, whereon the muskets of a platoon of zaptiehs glittered.

"Ah!" said Howard, "Bouclair thinks that his friend Nicolo might fight for the woman! I suppose he will have to use force! Poor devil! Trapped at the very gate of freedom!"

With a sudden spasm of prudence Howard Vinton leisurely ran the "Eros" back to her landing place, and ostentatiously ornamented the *café* and reading room all the afternoon!

He allowed Sergeant Foley to take a run on his own account. "Lay off and on; watch the movements of the 'Cornaro.' You can follow the police tug back into her landing, and by jumping off at the mole look in at the 'Scottish Arms,' and bring back to me any news you can pick up!"

Vinton sat enjoying his 'Bass' ale and poring over the illustrated journals a month old, while the hastily gathered gossips of Smyrna discussed in his presence the stopping of the "Cornaro."

"Smuggling!" said one. "Backsheesh not up to the mark!" cried another, and Howard Vinton bided his silence. But his eyes gleamed when a carriage stopped at the side door of the hotel in the dingy alley, and Emile Bouclair roughly aided a half-fainting woman to climb the stairs.

A messenger from the Consulate bade him attend the distribution of a mail, and at the door of the official residence he met Foley. "The steamer is twenty miles out at sea now, sir," he reported, "and a Turkish officer I know tells me Bouclair beat and cruelly abused this

poor woman on the tug! There was no violence on the steamer.

"This Turk tells me that Agathe swore an open vengeance and she kissed the cross on her oath! It rather amused these Turkish fellows." "I think that I will watch to-night," mused Vinton, when the Consul reported the delivery of the warning message to Captain Drage at Athens.

"I've seen Van Lennep," he said. "The 'Conqueror' has left the Piraeus on the chase by this time, and we must be simply cool and watchful, for Bouclair may think she was aided by us in her flight!"

And so, "Lord Vinton," driving leisurely to the Grand Hotel Huck, dined in solitary state at the end of the *table d'hôte* reserved for him. There was a chattering chorus from the circle of Smyrnites at the long table, and many an eye was slyly turned with a wink toward Bouclair's magnificent rooms. For the escapade was now public property!

All unconscious of the scandal, Howard Vinton sought his own rooms. Sergeant Foley's face looked very grave as he entered. "They've had an awful quarrel," he said, "and Bouclair has now locked the doors and put a black man on duty outside, cross-legged upon his mat. The bird is caged at last, safe enough!"

"He went away with the Captain of the Port in a carriage. I suppose they are off for a jollification!" "Then we'll quietly guard the public peace and sport

the oak!" rejoined the American. "For the game is now made, and it will play itself out now."

There was no sound from the corner where Agathe Mitis hid her sorrows in the gloom of defeat, and Howard Vinton watched from his balcony till the last revellers deserted the broad quay. The night was dark, and only the lights on the British war vessels gleamed on the bay when Vinton lay down to rest.

The two attendants had long since sought their beds. A strange restlessness disturbed the excited American. The strange vessel, with its mysterious cargo, was now far out of the jurisdiction of the proud Pasha of Smyrna, and Vinton tossed and turned as he thought of the stern chase of the "Conqueror."

"It's a wonderfully close-kept scheme," he mused. "For Van Lennep has poured out money here like water, and we have never broken their lines!"

He was already following Jack Masterson in his hazardous voyage, when a slight tapping aroused his attention. He sprung to the door leading to the servants' rooms. Darkness there and the sound of stentorian snoring.

"It's on the wall!" he whispered, as the tapping seemed to move to the front of his room. Breathlessly he listened, and then in few moments he leaped to the window.

For there was the carefully repeated tapping upon the solid wooden shutters. Pistol in hand, he carefully

loosened one of the leaves, and a slender hand was thrust through the opening!

"Agathe!" he whispered.

"My God! You will lose your life!" he gasped, as the woman lightly leaped into the room.

"Listen! I have but a moment! You are a gentleman, an English Lord! I have been whipped like a hound by this galley-slave Bouclair! I have sworn to have his heart's blood! But, first, to ruin them! I know all his schemes! The cargo on the 'Alessandro Cornaro' is all false, counterfeit, worthless! They intend to wreck this ship between Malta and Gibraltar! They only stop at Malta to see the insurance is safe in London! Seventy thousand pounds on the cargo, thirty thousand on the ship, and they have already got forty thousand pounds advances on the goods. 'Sassoon and Company' are to be swindled! Schnorr of London is one of them—the robbers, 'Komanos and Company!'"

"What is the cargo?" whispered Vinton.

"The oil barrels are filled with water, the opium cases with bricks, the valonia is forest bark, worthless; the raisin boxes are filled with wooden blocks; the figs are old refuse, for imitation coffee making; the sultanines are rotten trash! Notify the British Consul!

"Have the ship seized at Malta or Gibraltar, and thwart the vile swindle! Let a war ship follow them! Now, I am revenged, for these laughing scoundrels stood by and saw Bouclair beat me! There are fifty

men here who raised five hundred pounds each for this swindle, and they have been all repaid from the advances. Expose them—see the British admiral! *The swindle is on the London insurance companies!*

“Schnorr got all the bills of lading, except a few little ones, and after Bouclair is ruined, if he does not go to the galleys, I swear by the God above I will kill him, and then myself. Watch over yourself night and day! Go to the consulate. Bouclair will find a sure way to murder you! Now, I go!”

She had cowered in his arms, shivering as she told her story. “I will protect you! I will take you to the consulate and send you safely out!” he whispered.

“Ah!” she cried, “I am a homeless devil! I only live for revenge! If I kill Bouclair, then Nicolo is free! Poor Dimitri! This devil holds him under the grip of the law for killing the Bimbashi!”

“Then, I will stay near you, Agathe, and save you!” gasped Vinton, “for you have been brave and true.” With an appealing gesture, she pointed to the window. “It is my life! *Save it now!*”

The young man swung the shutter. Fearless as a chamois, the desperate woman sprang out on the ledge and was instantly lost in the darkness. Howard Vinton stood transfixed at the window, till a hollow tapping on the wall told him all was well!

His brain was whirling. He barred the solid shutters and lit his light. Carefully opening the door to Foley’s room, he roused the Sergeant.

"Hush!" he cried. "Come in and help me dress. Rouse the man!" And he then dragged the astonished Sergeant into his room. "Get your own clothes on! Get your arms and take a stout club. We have got to go to the consulate."

In five minutes they passed out into the hall. The lazy guard was lying across Agathe Mitis' door, sound asleep, and they gained the ground floor without arousing him.

A light shone still from the *café*, and a servant peered out. "Give us a couple of brandies and sodas," demanded Vinton. "I must go and see the English doctor." As the two men gained the street, Vinton paused to see the windows of Agathe Mitis' rooms, all darkened in gloomy silence.

A carriage rattled up as the two men shrank back into a shadow. Emile Bouclair, chanting old *café* refrains, rolled out, drunken and laughing, and essayed the entrance with unsteady steps.

"You brute!" growled Vinton. "Here goes for the first nail in your coffin!"

He waited long enough to see the three rooms above lit up, and then led the astounded Foley around a corner. The Sergeant was at last satisfied of his master's sanity.

"I have business with Consul Fitzgerald—affairs of life and death!" he whispered, as the two men plodded along, club and revolver in hand, treading on frowsy curs and sleeping porters.

"Better take to the open road; it is safer," said the Sergeant, and then the night wanderers lit the cigars which indicated two Europeans "on guard" and watchful.

The leaden waters plashed against the lonely quay as they strode along, a star or two relieving the darkness of the small hours. Howard Vinton's excitement had taken away his reasoning powers.

It then flashed over him that the advances obtained from Sassoon & Company were obtained by fraudulent means. "They are a superb firm of world-famous merchants, and this Schnorr is probably only the dummy agent! The insurances, too, were gained by fraud! Ah! Now I have you on the hip, Mr. Bouclair!"

It came suddenly to Vinton that he, alone, had discovered the mysterious secret which Fitzgerald and Van Lennep had failed to unearth. "It makes Drage the Chief Inspector for life—and—it gives to me the right to demand my own reward!" The night breezes seemed to whisper "Lily Arnot!" He reflected, "But the 'Conqueror' has already sailed."

The young man puzzled till they reached the consul's gate. Then he entered triumphant, while Foley roused the gate-keeper, and they were admitted.

Maurice Fitzgerald sprang up to hear Howard Vinton's strange request. "I must ask you to send three cipher dispatches at once! Not a moment's delay! One to the Governor of Malta, for Captain Drage; one to Lloyds' agent at Malta, and one to my old friend

John Higginbotham, Royal Exchange, London. All to be repeated back!"

"I can send for the operator to come here," said the Consul, "and you can go with him and see it done. I'll send my own clerk, as I have a right to send all government dispatches at any hour of the day or night. What's your news?"

"There's a human life in danger, and my honour as a man compels me to seal my lips!" gravely said the American; "but rest assured we have got them in the toils now!" and the excited young lover never closed an eye that night. For he slept not until he had received the return acknowledgment of the messages.

There was a haggard gleam in his eyes as he wandered around for four days after the night visit of the desperate woman. But a smile of victory wreathed his lips when he read a dispatch brought by the Consul in person. Its words, dated Malta, were brief, but they avenged Agathe in her helplessness.

"Following on. Jack Masterson is here—sails to Gibraltar to-morrow. You have won the day! Wait and watch. Drage."

And, by dint of watching, he found a safe chance to whisper one day to Agathe the Serpent, as she listlessly mounted the grand staircase. Her eyes were downcast, for now she followed Bouclair in and out like a mute spaniel; but the gleam of those despairing, downcast eyes held the suspended death of the lightning's bolt.

She was only biding her own time, and nursing the wrath to come! The sad-eyed Van Lennep soberly informed the young American that he had received dispatches of a secret nature bidding him now abandon all further action in the matter of "Komanos and Company."

For now the white-hulled "Conqueror" was gliding along the Mediterranean and never losing sight of the lumbering "Cornaro" as she neared the Balearic Islands. There was a little official by-play at Malta, which had given to the Governor all the secrets of the dozen telegrams exchanged with London and Smyrna by Captain Dimitri Nicolo.

When, eight days later, the "Alessandro Cornaro" dragged into port heavily along under the shadows of the great rock, Captain Nicolo was raging at heart, as he bade his own boat be cleared away.

For the great fleet white steam yacht had ceaselessly dogged him every league from Malta, running along between the freighter and the nearest shore, like a hawk hovering around a crippled bird.

"Is it madness, is it a dream, this white devil?" foamed the baffled Nicolo, as the snaky beauty ran along seeking the naval anchorage. "Some fiend of hell has set this fellow on to dog us!

"And he flies the flag of the Royal Yacht Squadron! Perhaps a naval dispatch boat in disguise. Our plan has failed! I must wait." A "Gib" cutter raced out, when the port boarding boat slowly laboured along, and

then, slowly drifting past, a weighted package was tossed on the "Cornaro's" deck.

Nicolo himself grasped it, and his face paled as he read the lines of a dispatch:

"Our enterprise now impossible. We are watched here night and day. You are followed. Do nothing but coal, and come on straight. Anchor at the Downs. Don't enter the Thames. Tug there to meet you with secret orders. We have been betrayed."

The signature "Schnorr" told the ominous story of the ruin of "Komanos and Company"—and Enos Drage was already in London—on the watch! Greek had met Greek, and the Gibraltar port authorities were ready to seize the ship!

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTAIN ENOS DRAGE MAKES A MORNING VISIT! A STRANGE CRAFT AT GRAVESEND!

CAPTAIN Dimitri Nicolo stood at the companion way of the "Alessandro Cornaro" with a scowling face and black murder in his heart. He had called Sandy McGregor to his side to act as interpreter.

"Just tell these fellows we have put in here for coal and orders—that's all. I'll go on shore and make my declarations and see our agent! Who in h—ll could have betrayed us? There's your English chum, the head stoker?"

"Pooh!" replied the chief engineer. "Jack Master-son was tipsy at Malta, that's all! Those Maltese girls are witches! He will tumble along here on the next boat. He knows that we coal here."

"I wish he would come; he would be useful now, then," said the mollified Nicolo.

After the customs boat had left, Captain Nicolo eyed the Bay of Algeiras, with its oblong pond eight miles by five.

The anchorage was crowded with vessels, and, nearest of all, lay his enemy, the graceful white steam yacht, her fires banked. There was a pretty steam launch now tossing by her side gangway, and a regular man o' war's watch kept on her deck.

"We are in a hole here, Sandy, a regular trap!" growled Dimitri Nicolo. "I am only safe while on the ship. I need you here for the machinery. There's the devil of a white witch that has hung around us since we passed Andro and Nicaria!

"Now, that sneaking devil Van Lennap has set them on! His heart's blood shall pay for it! Come down in the cabin and we will have a talk. I have a dispatch to show you!"

Old Sandy McGregor was eyeing the grim hill of Tarik, for twelve hundred years the fortified gate of the Mediterranean.

"There's no use to flinch now, Dimitri," he said. "We are under the guns of the fortress. We must be bold, and yet wise! D—n it all! I passed a dozen

places where I could have easily settled her down in ten fathoms in half an hour by just hauling out the sea-plug! Did you notice that white witch has followed us by the chart? Whenever we got on to soundings, she always ran in between us and the bank.

"It's the old turn of luck! We've done the trick three times, you and I, and have always collected the money with no trouble. Now, I have a plan of my own! Let's coal up here and go out easily to the end of the strait! We've got a six-mile back current running in from the Atlantic.

"There's nothing but that one white spectre to hurt us! Keep cool! When we run out I will see that the 'Cornaro' is fired at a dozen places in the hold! The oil aboard will be a good excuse!

"You can have the boats all ready, and let her drift back burning in full sight of the town. We can take to the boats and land at Ceuta! There will be no fear these fellows will tow her in for fear of firing the shipping! And I'll pull the sea plug when I set her on fire, and she'll blow up soon enough!" Dimitri Nicolo turned a despairing face towards him.

"I dare not! Read that! Schnorr orders me to come on to the Downs!"

"Well! D—n my eyes!" roared McGregor.

"But he has some foxy plan already! He has heard from our spies here and at Malta! I wish that we knew!"

"So do I," snarled Nicolo; "but I am now afraid to risk you or myself on shore."

He was sweeping the strand of the basin with his glasses. The three tiers of houses rose up under the grey hill, where the wild game hides among the straggling shrubs, grassy patches and cave honey-combed sides of the huge rock, which has been four times taken and three times withstood an overwhelming array of foes.

"They may be afraid to come out to us!" said Nicolo. "There's that blamed white ghost of a yacht! By Heavens! If I caught her in the Greek sea I'd board her and cut the throat of the last mother's son! Yes! Someone on shore is watching our agents, and this fellow will watch us! We are in a hole!"

"There's a boat coming with one man in it!" suddenly cried McGregor, and the two men waited in suspense till stout Jack Masterson pulled alongside, looking weary and unkempt. "What the deuce have you been up to?" growled the enraged Greek.

"I got left behind at Malta only by five minutes," faltered the sturdy prodigal. "I've had a mighty rough time! I stoked my way with a coal shovel to join you here. If you don't want me, I can get a ship home here and have a good job. I'll take my kit off the boat," he defiantly said.

"Go down to the steward quick and get a good meal!" sullenly said Captain Nicolo. "I need you here, and I will pay you well if you only let rum alone. Fix yourself up decently! I want you to go on shore to see my agents. How much coal do we want?"

"Three hundred tons," carelessly said Jack Masterson, as he lounged up to McGregor. "Let me have ten pounds, Sandy!" he said. "I am hard up!"

"Be ready in half an hour! I'll send my cutter and tow your boat back," said Nicolo, and he dragged the old conspirator away to the cabin.

"I think that I see daylight now ahead," chuckled Jack Masterson, as he regaled himself in the messroom. "And Mary Horton will pull the old boat in, hand over hand!" He was quite a respectable object when he reappeared on deck.

Busy in the captain's room he could see the two agents of Komanos and Company laying their heads together. It was the cautious Scot who dissuaded the fiery Greek corsair from any rash attempt!

"You see, Schnorr himself has got the thousand pounds in this venture and an English prison to face! He will have his own crafty plans all laid! We have 'obeyed orders' to the hair! We have been driven past Sicily, Sardinia, the Balearic Islands, and even Cartagena, where we have our local friends, by that cursed yacht! She goes three leagues to our one, and probably has a couple of little rifle-guns aboard and fifty stand of repeaters! We might all get hung for piracy!

"Now, here's Jack Masterson, who is as honest as the edge of a sword! Give him your dispatches to Schnorr and to Bouclair, and let him send them. Keep dark as to the agents here! Just send them a letter

for the three hundred tons of coal. Slap that on board. Keep your mouth shut here! For if we are carefully watched at sea, we are doubly watched on shore! We must now play the 'innocence act!'

"Fix up your cipher dispatch and tell Schnorr to send you an open dispatch to coal and proceed to Gravesend. We will busy the crew and put the old boat in good shape."

The two partners in crime watched Jack Masterson sweep away in great dignity with the letter and dispatches. "It was a lucky hit for us that he came on after us," said Nicolo, "for now, we are clear of all these Gibraltar agents! There's no one here to turn against us. He will get the cipher answers addressed to him!"

The captain and Mc Gregor proceeded to make a comfortable night of it. It was ten o'clock before Masterson returned.

"Everything is ship-shape!" he reported to Mc-Gregor. "The barges will be alongside at daybreak, and they say they will fill our bunkers in two days." He threw down a bundle of letters.

"By the way, Captain," he said, "that steam launch of the yacht is slowly circling around the 'Cornaro' on a regular watch! She made three circles while I was rowing off shore!"

The two frightened rascals sought the deck. "Ah! Corpo di Bacco!" snarled Nicolo in a mad rage. "If I dared—"

"Just keep cool," snorted old McGregor. "Let them circle and be blowed! You see they dare not come on board! Keep your head and we will be off soon. Everything is all right!"

And so Jack Masterson flattered himself as he stowed himself away in his snug bunk that night. "Great guns! Won't old Enos dance a jig when he gets my dispatches, and has also the copies of Nicolo's telegrams!"

The old man-o'-war's man rejoiced in a crisp fifty-pound note handed him by Lloyds' agent, who grimly smiled when Masterson secretly reported to him.

"My boy!" said the agent, "we have got hold of these fellows' cipher now, and Van Lennep, Drage and Lloyds' committee will have everything run over the wires to them at once.

"The Lords of Admiralty would have justified us in seizing this ship here! But we will let the 'Alessandro Cornaro' go ahead and finish up her voyage, just to teach 'Komanos and Company' a lesson in purse and person! They are in the toils now. They can't escape us. I want you to stick to this boat as long as she flies the black circle and the K!

"Then, if you work any more after you've finished this cruise, it will be only from choice. For we'll chase her to Kamchatka, but we ruin them! We have them in the net!

"This game young American, Vinton, at Smyrna, has stumbled on the key of the mystery! And old

‘Shun Lee’ Drage has sharpened his fangs! He is a sea wolf and a hold-fast to the death!”

Jack Masterson paused in his self-gratulations to grumble, “It’s mighty hard lines that I can’t take a drop, but, by hokey, if these fellows would catch me betraying them, they would ram me into the furnace of the ‘Cornaro!’ But, wait till I strike Southsea!”

And then the old sea dog placidly called up the waiting Mary Horton as a fetich of delight!

When Enos Drage had turned the fleet “Conqueror” over to Hozier at the departure of the “Alessandro Cornaro” from Malta, he pondered long over the strange speculations of Komanos and Company while voyaging alone as far as Marseilles. On the Messagerie Maritimes boat he calmly reviewed the whole situation.

“I have the prize of my life, the Chief Inspectorship, now under my very hand, if Hozier only dogs that Will-o’-the-wisp boat safely to Gibraltar!” With a delicious sense of power he now ruminated upon all the legal steps he would take at London. Mesh by mesh the net had closed around the “Alessandro Cornaro.”

“Brave fellow is Vinton, a perfect brick! What in heaven’s name can I do to reward him!” The old sea dog was as yet unconscious that Howard Vinton proposed to reward himself in kind by accepting “The Child” as a full payment of all his arduous services! He was unaware, too, that his escort of the “Cornaro” through the Greek sea had caused Captain Nicolo to run in to Malta for orders, and so had thrown Jack

Masterson into his own hands, as a final witness of the unlawful voyage of the giant tramp.

Drage had telegraphed back to Vinton to guard Agathe's secret as inviolable. "I'm not going to give the Secret Committee this tip! I'll just get the 'order of arrest' and then spring my tableau at the right time!"

Captain Enos halted at Paris only long enough to ascertain that the "Cornaro" was now coaled up and ready to sail for London direct. When he had "filled his lockers" with Paris trifles for Miss Lavinia and "The Child," he ran down to Havre.

"If I ever get faithful old Jack Masterson by the fin again, he shall know what I think of him!" mused Enos as he grimly smiled at the little four-foot customs Frenchman tossing his traps aboard the channel steamer.

For, sturdy old John Higginbotham had telegraphed to Havre to the agent of Lloyds to inform "Shun Lee" Drage that the cipher was at last conquered and that, thanks to Jack, they had now tapped Schnorr's secret orders, which read, "to come on to the Downs, without accident," and there await the firm's tug!

"Glory!" cried the happy retired captain, "I'll have a smart fishing boat and dance around the tramp when she comes to anchor, and then, too, our own secret police will shadow everyone who goes out on the tug!"

"And, so far, Bouclair seemingly trusts all to

Schnorr! How in the deuce did Jack Masterson get at the cipher?"

Drage could not believe how lynx-like on the watch Jack Masterson had hovered around the two drunken conspirators at Gibraltar till he had found the key of the code transposition lying on the table where big Sandy McGregor snored away in the happy Nirvana of a drunkard's heaven!

Captain Dimitri Nicolo was obliged to trust his rubicund chief engineer as a fellow criminal in handling the troublesome cable code. He dared not trust his own broken English. With perfect insular calmness, Enos Drage drove direct to Morley's Hotel, and was engaged in discussing his chops and a pot of bitter when the members of the Secret Committee came one by one to his lair.

"Well, Mr. Chief Inspector!" laughed Higginbotham, "you had better run down to Southsea for a day or so and try to calm their frightened ladies! I've had a dozen requests from them already for news! Then, get back to us here! You must not even approach the Royal Exchange. The whole Levantine fruit trade is in a wild fever of speculation over this enormous coming cargo, and spies, brokers and agents are swarming around." We have, however, a dozen Scotland Yard men watching Schnorr and Company,—and, by the way, Messrs. Sassoon and Company have been dragged into the ownership of a great quantity of the opium cargo.

"Enos, you had better come back and stay at my house!" smiled Higginbotham, "we've got these fellows securely trapped, and I want your welcoming dinner on your Chief Inspector's appointment to be given there. You must not lose the 'Cornaro' an instant from sight, though—from the very moment she anchors!"

"What can I do for Vinton?" mused Enos Drage, as he left the triumphant committee after an hour's séance. He pondered over this all the way to sunny Southsea, where the April buds were breaking on the leafy trees.

It was midnight when he reached his own home.

"Bless me, Lily! What's this? Tears?" the astonished veteran cried, as the beautiful girl clung to his breast sobbing. "They will kill him! Why did you not bring him?" the blushing maiden faltered.

"Bring—bring who?"

"Howard!" faltered "The Child," as she fled away to her fastness, the little room where her silent heart always kept a loving watch over the young vedette on duty in the Orient.

"God bless my soul! You'll bring him back soon enough!" smiled the astounded veteran, a light breaking in upon his darkened mind!

"That's the way the breeze blows,—now,—is it?"

And he had secretly made it up with Miss Lavinia before he went to his lair.

"You see, I owe the whole thing to him! He's a most gallant fellow!"

"But, he is not in Her Majesty's Service!" mourned the stern Lavinia.

"He's in Lily's service, that's better!" heartily said Drage, as he took up his bed candlestick, and plodded upstairs, dreaming of his many traps now set for "Komanos and Company."

He proposed to confer with Miss Lavinia further as regarded "The Child's" strange cardiac agitation!

Captain Enos Drage rejoiced when he opened his eyes and saw the neatly shaven lawns of Southsea, and the familiar faces thronging the Marine Parade.

"Nothing like old England!" he joyously cried, gazing at the superb marine panorama of the Solent.

He leisurely made his breakfast, and, by eleven o'clock, had arranged all his personal affairs for an absence of a month.

The stern Lavinia's brief account of her stewardship, and her martial report of the household garrison's doings was most satisfactory.

"Here's my address for all wires and letters. Higginbotham's house. I take the evening train up, and then I will need all my wits about me! Has Lily said anything to you as to her feelings toward our young American friend?"

"Not a word," answered Lavinia. "She is now out shopping!"

"H'm!" slowly said Enos Drage. "I'll have a little talk with her myself when she comes in!"

The old Captain had studied out his whole recondite

business plans, over chart and memorandums, before he could corner the graceful Miss Lily, who seemed to evade him, in a most elusive manner, on this pleasant afternoon.

With a recognition of Miss Lavinia, as a slightly adverse influence, old "Shun Lee" succeeded at last in convoying "The Child" out for a walk! There was a downcast shyness in her eyes, a bright crimson hovering on her cheeks, as they finally rested, by the throbbing sea, having duly noted the familiar array of bathing houses, pleasure boats, children at play on the long brown beach, and the furtive assaults of the natty Tommy Atkins upon the peace of mind of the pretty nurse girls.

Drage noted with pride the substantial array of ships and land defences, and casting a mute look of defiance toward the shores of hostile France, he slowly turned his dreamy eyes from the sea horizon to the blushing girl at his side.

"I wanted to ask you, Lily, how far this thing has gone on between you and young Vinton! Lavinia tells me that he writes you regularly!"

"There's nothing to tell as yet, Uncle Enos," the girl faltered, with her sparkling eyes following a dashing yacht, now sweeping on gallantly toward that Mecca of yachtsmen, Cowes harbour!

"But, I think it is simply awful—just horrid—that Howard should be left alone there, out in the East,—facing hidden dangers—the Aleppo plague, and all that—just for other people's money!"

Her little arched foot was tapping the gravelled walk most impatiently.

"We busy men spend all our lives fighting 'for other people's money,'" replied the veteran, "either in guarding it, or trying to get at it!"

"But the whole benefit of this struggle comes at last to you!" mutinously said "The Child," "and Howard gets nothing, absolutely nothing!" she said, grinding her little boot-heel viciously down into the sand.

"He will—in time!" dryly said the old officer, as he touched his cap to the moving procession of retired Admirals, Generals, Judges, and all those who have put the armour off.

"Of course, I know; but he never would have gone out there but for me!" softly said "The Child," with the faint glow of a triumphant smile on her sea-shell cheeks. "I want you to know this! Aunt Lavinia does not know it. But I wanted you to get this Inspectorship,—and, I made Howard go! Yes! I made him go!"

"Has he spoken to you yet?" feebly cross-questioned Enos. "How do you know that he loves you?"

"He has not spoken, but I know—all that I care to know! I am sure—yes, sure—that he loves me! And,—here you are safely back, and he is alone out there, and—in great danger!"

There was the shadow of unshed tears in the girl's beautiful eyes.

"Do you love him, my dear Little One?" said the old sailor.

"I want you to help me, that's all!" said Lily, vaguely, as she rose and drew a cabalistic figure in the gravel with the ferrule of her sunshade. "It is all so strange! I have no mother, you know! And,—Aunt Lavinia does not understand!"

"There, my dearest! It will come out all right! Just you trust to me! Aunt Lavinia will do as I wish! Leave it all to me! Now, let us go back, for I must be off to London!" said the old man, touched at heart by the orphan's appeal.

"And you promise me?" the glowing girl said.

"I promise!" the veteran replied, vaguely feeling that he had forever committed himself, now, to what he afterward designated as "the whole programme."

And so there was the peace of a great love and a mutual trust between the gnarled and battered old veteran and the beautiful girl, as they slowly returned to St. Aubrey's Villa.

Miss Lavinia, now at the helm of domestic affairs, eyed the couple keenly, but she was fain to be content when Enos said, "I would just leave that little matter to run on, quietly! I would leave these young people entirely to themselves. We will see what comes, with time!"

Miss Lavinia softly sighed as she recognised as final her stern old brother's decision to leave the Lily of Southsea a certain "free will" in the disposition of her own charming self for the future which still lay before her, rich with all its golden possibilities of life and love.

Uncle Enos Drage drove away, stout-hearted, to his coming battle with Komanos and Company, realising that the fighting would soon be on! He had written a careful dispatch to Howard Vinton, begging him to be wary. "Watch over Van Lennep! Keep your eyes on him, and warn him! These fellows know now that they are being cornered closely, and they may strike back sharply at Van Lennep! They naturally will give him all the credit of running them down! I rely, however, on you and your prudence in all! These men will be simply desperate when I head them off here, and you must wait on guard at Smyrna till I have either seized the ship or else driven them to bay!"

The old man dreamed of the future glories of the Chief Inspectorship, and realised the truth that the "bread of love cast upon the waters of the past years had returned again!" For he knew now, that gentle Lily Arnot had sent her own knight errant out to battle for her own sweet sake! "I will owe it to them both—and surely they must have their reward!"

That night the girl, happy at heart, indited a dispatch of unusual inflammability to her absent suitor, while the softened Lavinia sat alone in her room, wistfully regarding the faded portrait of the handsome naval Lieutenant who had died so long ago, under the flag, out in Burmah!

"He is about the same age!" the spinster faltered, and all the tenderness of the loyal faith which she had borne to her own lover, in those months of waiting for

the absent, caused her awakened heart to beat in sympathy for the motherless child!

Lily Arnot knew when she met her aunt the next morning in the unusual demonstration of diurnal affection, that the dead had been speaking for the living!

"It will be all right, my dear child," the faded lady said, and she vowed that at least one woman of the fighting Drage blood should be happy. Her own loveless life all rose up before her now, in its long, silent, lonely vistas, and she saw again the face of the pale loving mother who was cut off in her youth, in the very dewy freshness of the unfolding rose of Life! And her aged heart bloomed out again in roses of Love!

It was on the third day after the "Alessandro Cornaro" had cast her anchor under the shadows of Gibraltar, and that Jack Masterson had reported "full bunkers," when Captain Nicolo and his Italian first officer, Corvini, were glowering from the stern at the still motionless white yacht.

"Get up steam slowly," growled Dimitri Nicolo to the now sullen McGregor. "I want to watch that sneaking English spy boat. If she gets up her steam to follow us out, by Jove, I'll just run her down and turn her over on her anchor cables! I'll take the wheel myself!"

The desperate Greek and his angry Italian mate had stealthily watched the slow circling of the steam launch picket-boat for night after night! And all Nicolo's secret intercourse with his agents, all his bribing of boatmen

merely told him that it was the English private yacht "Conqueror!"

But no gay pleasure party made merry on its decks! No laughing garrison ladies waved their nodding plumes in merry victory on the stranger's snowy decks. Only a stern bearded officer—his blue cap, gold-banded—walked the hostile "Conqueror's" decks on watch!

A hairy-breasted old quartermaster had boldly run the picket-launch a dozen times a day around the "Cornaro" at half-pistol shot! Cheerfully unconscious, Jack Masterson had designedly sought the safe retreat of the furnace rooms when the agent's cutter had brought off an open dispatch to proceed to Gravesend "for orders."

All seemed to be perfectly tranquil in the harbour!

"Gran Dio!" muttered Nicolo, "if I dared but to go on shore and rake up some of the old boys! I'd pay this 'white wolf' off."

But the fear of the British Lion, "couchant, regardant," deterred the fearful Nicolo!

"The whole thing is here together in their power, ship and cargo. If I set foot on shore, Basta!—they might detain me, and then trap me with their crooked admiralty law!"

And so, all hands curiously watched the "Conqueror," as the black smoke of departure poured out of the funnels of the great tramp. There had been no positive interference beyond the white boat's menacing police patrol.

And yet, in Dimitri Nicolo's heart, an unknown fear always lurked now,—an uneasiness as to the final outcome which he could not explain! In vain he had sent the willing Jack Masterson on shore! The secret friends who now dared not approach the Levantine argosy only sent out a brief, hurry dispatch from London when Nicolo had reported by telegraph his sailing hour!

And Smyrna was most ominously silent!

“What the deuce is up now with Emile Bouclair! Has luck turned at last!” growled the Greek. “Wait till I smuggle Agathe away to a safe place. If the Captain of the ‘Apollo’ does not fail me, I will yet settle my personal account with that French brute! I’ll strike as soon as this run is safe! If I cannot reach him,—then my old felucca mates can! And then, Komanos and Company will have a new Secretary!”

There was not a sign of life on the yacht “Conqueror” as the “Cornaro” swept along, forging slowly ahead in the adverse current, and passed her silent enemy, at a mere cable’s length! Not a feather of blue smoke floated out from the two brass-cased steel funnels. Even the hated steam launch now drifted idly astern of the anchored yacht.

“We are free of this spying fellow at last!” chuckled Sandy McGregor to Jack Masterson, as the “Alessandro Cornaro” drove slowly along toward Cape Tarifa! Jack was in a most happy mood!

He had dispatched a letter to Mary Horton which was calculated to arouse an unwonted agitation in the

maid's plump bodice, and arouse her hopes of a material happiness to be realised in the near future. He had successfully eluded every suspicion so far!

"My eyes! won't they just dance in the morning!" he muttered. But he stuffed his pipe and gazed quietly at a neat little two-thousand ton freighter running smoothly along, lingering between the "Cornaro" and the rock! "That fellow will surely beat us two days to the Lizard!" he remarked to McGregor.

"Yes," said the Chief, lowering his glass. "She's a good type, neat loaded, and, I guess, a fast fruit boat!"

"Safe enough!" laughed Masterson, as he turned in for a nap.

He had his coal-shovellers all now in a wholesome awe of "il gran Inglese!"

There was a stern-faced man left behind, standing on the poop deck of the "Conqueror," who watched the "Cornaro" labour along against the tide. Colonel Hozier laughed heartily as the huge tramp disappeared from his view.

"Signor Capitano Dimitri Nicolo!" he said. "You will surely miss the 'Conqueror' on your run around Spain, but the 'Scottish Chief' will show you the same courtesies of the high seas, or else,—I'm a land lubber!"

He turned away with a smile to his deck officer. "Anson!" said he, "I'll give you a silver loving cup if you can beat the record to Marseilles! I've got a sudden fit of homesickness, and I want to hear the sound of Bow Bells as soon as I can."

And so all hands sprang to their work to make steam, for but one man held the secret of the strange dallying cruise in his bosom!

Colonel Hozier proposed at once to reinforce the Secret Committee of Lloyds, which was now eagerly awaiting the arrival of Enos Drage to plant him as a marine picket, on the Goodwin Sands.

"It's a case of Greek and Greek," roared Hozier. "This Corsair captain will find the black-hulled 'Scottish Chief' clinging just as closely to him as my own white sea-bird 'Conqueror!'

"Messrs. Komanos and Company! You are check-mated!"

He waved a parting blessing to the British flag on the rock, as the "Conqueror" leapt away like a frightened greyhound.

All that live-long night, the Greek captain and his Italian mate watched the red and green lights of their sea companion, "Scottish Chief," with a growing anxiety. At daybreak, Nicolo, with a haggard face, roused up the half-inebriated Sandy McGregor.

"See here!" he shouted. "You told me that boat was surely going two knots to our one as we passed out of the straits! There she is now,—not a single league away! What does it mean?"

Tommaso Corvini answered his officer at once, while the big Scotchman's heart sank within him.

"She has carefully waited on us the whole night!" the Italian muttered.

"Yes! and she's only moving along at half-speed now, to dog us as far as Gravesend," yelled McGregor, with a curse.

"We may all run into quod the very moment we strike English waters! That fellow is a spy! He, too, has got the tip!"

The old Scotch adventurer sought the easy comfort of the bottle.

"Our cake is dough on this unlucky run!" he growled. And then he began to wonder if Bouclair had not sold them out!

It was four days before the lumbering freighter ran into the choppy seas of the English Channel, and when she stole along past the Goodwin Sands and anchored safely on the Downs,—the "Scottish Chief" neatly dropped two anchors and moored not five hundred fathoms away!

There was a fresh breeze now roughening the Channel, and the guns of Deal, Dover and Sandown Castles all covered with a crossfire the smooth expanse of still water within the banks, where for a thousand years the treacherous "Goodwins" have claimed their prey!

Four men were gathered together as the mist swept around the "Cornaro," hiding all the chalk cliffs.

It was the secret council of Nicolo and his astonished subordinates.

"There is either a traitor on board, or else the devil has broken loose out of hell!" fumed the Greek. "Here I am,—in a hole,—with not a single word of orders,

and the night coming on! Bank your fires!" he cried, turning to Jack.

"Come down into my cabin, McGregor! I want you to help me out here!"

There was all the ferocity of a wounded tiger in the Greek's foaming rage!

Jack Masterson was very glad to get out of the danger zone, and to dive below to execute the Captain's last orders.

"Do they really suspect me? If so, good-bye, Mary Horton!" he murmured, but as he gazed out helplessly over the vessel's quarter, he soon saw a trawling boat dash by in the fresh breeze, and, under sou'westers and a big fisherman hooded oil-skin hat,—the weather-beaten features of Captain Enos Drage shone out!

"By Gad! The old man's at the tiller himself! And he has the light of battle on his face!"

All fear now vanished from Jack Masterson's breast in a trice!

"I swear old 'Shun Lee' looks as if he would storm the ship before morning! He can't even wait for his prey to come into the Thames! Once inside,—we are all likely to be soon in the clutches of Her Majesty's Customs Officers!"

He stole a glance at the waters, now half-veiled with a creeping mist, and saw near by a battered little steam tug, creeping down on the "Alessandro Cornaro."

"Ah! Now I know! Drage is only piping off these fellows. He will let them make the game! And,—it's

all up,—the very moment this insurance is void, when we cross the line of the Nore! It is death to ‘Komanos and Company’ when we reach the voyage’s end—Gravesend! These scoundrels are simply dished! But who the dickens is on the tug?”

For private reasons, Jack Masterson did not reappear on deck, but when his orders to bank the fires were all duly under way, he sought a snug place below decks, where he could gaze out unperceived.

The fisher trawling boat was leisurely knocking about in the vicinity, and the little tug had at last steamed up to the quickly lowered gangway!

“I’ll keep shady! Mum’s the word, unless Mary Horton’s husband will be married with his throat slit! There’s no safety in fooling with Captain Nicolo, now!”

Chief Engineer Sandy McGregor had listened to the maddened Greek’s outpouring. He coolly said, “You are in charge as yet! Dimitri! I can’t advise you now! All I can do is to tell you not to venture to cross the customs line at Gravesend! You are now cut off between two fires here! If you are in any way unfortunate here on the Downs,—then your insurance is void! You can’t stay here forever and risk bad weather! The very moment the pilot and customs officer board you at Gravesend, then—you are just as helpless as a child! These fellows up in London have probably made some new plan for us,—all that you can do is to wait.”

He glanced out of the cabin door,—“Holy Smoke! There’s Schnorr himself!”

And then he rose and waddled out, as the anxious face of a burly man of middle age appeared at the door. "Here! Nicolo! Every moment is precious! Get your wits together and lock the door!" the newcomer sharply said, "I may, even now, be too late! The sly Custom House fellows may be on board here any moment! Have you been boarded as yet?"

Nicolo gruffly shook his head.

"I've only obeyed your orders! Here I am, and,—you know the rest!"

"Get me a glass of brandy! I'm wet to the bone! All may be well yet, but you've got to mind your eye! A single mistake will do us out of a hundred and forty thousand pounds!"

In the cold drizzle of a murky night, Jack Masterson crept up close to the Captain's cabin window. There were the two rascals with their heads very near together, fighting hard now to take the "Cornaro" out of "Shun Lee" Drage's trap!

He slipped around the silent decks. And the nearest cheering thing that he saw, was the red and green light of the "Scottish Chief" as she slowly swung with the tide!

"Blast my eyes! They have nicely sewed us up!" laughed Jack, "and,—I shouldn't wonder if old Drage was roosting up above us on the main truck! We won't be lonely any more!"

He decided that the nearness of Dover Castle now justified him in joining McGregor in a quiet little jollification over their safe arrival in the Downs!

In default of a "Black-Eyed Susan," the two mariners toyed with the magic black bottle.

"Where do we go in the morning?" hazarded Jack.

"Oh!" laughed the old Silenus. "Anywhere from Teneriffe to Tampico! From Cronstadt to Coromandel! Nicolo is closeted with that bullet-headed Dutchman Schnorr now, and I've a notion that he'd like very much to cut stick and clear out! You'd better stick to the ship, Jack! Don't leave me here, a poor devil in trouble! I'll see that Nicolo squares you out in great shape!"

"Count on me, Sandy!" cheerily said the old man-o'-war'sman. "I never go back on an old shipmate!"

Mr. Jack Masterson realised that he was cooped up alone on the ownerless ship, with twenty-five angry cut-throats.

"It's a rum old lay out! Nobody seems to know who runs the ship or owns the cargo, or what's up from day to day!" said Jack, filling the chief's glass.

"We're free of the whole ocean with Komanos and Company behind us!" cheerily said McGregor. "There's more than one way to skin a cat! Old Schnorr is just as smart as chain lightning! He will find the way out!"

It was four o'clock, and the wet fogs wrapped the dreary waters when Sandy McGregor's heavy hand roused Jack Masterson, chief stoker of the diligently pursued ocean tramp.

"Show a leg, Jack!" bawled McGregor. "Get up

steam as quick as you can; we are going to crawl up to Gravesend now! I've had a hard night of it! Old Schnorr and Nicolo have been pumping me with regard to our crew! Schnorr swears that we have either a traitor or a Jonah on board!"

"Nonsense," sleepily said Jack. "Your enemies are all at Smyrna! It's the deuced Syrians, these peddlers who are afraid this enormous cargo will break down the market for Levantine products,—and, so, they will try and get you in all sorts of trouble till they have first cleared out their own consignments!"

"By Heaven! You may be right!" growled McGregor. "I'll post Schnorr on this. But they trust no one now. They got me dead drunk, and I woke up with my own pockets all turned inside out! The 'old man' is going off on the tug to Dover with Schnorr and Tom Corvini will then take this old tub up to Gravesend. The skipper and Schnorr are going to put up some kind of a new job in London!"

"Most likely they will telegraph to Smyrna for orders!" growled Masterson, as he hobbled away, thanking his stars that he possessed no single scrap of incriminating paper! "Shun Lee" Drage's words returned; sage words of warning!—"Say what you please to man or woman alone, but never put a word in writing!"

When Jack had set his fires aglow, he tumbled up for a breath of fresh air.

The trawling smack was anchored not a hundred

yards away, and he saw old Enos Drage indulging in a morning scrub of his shining red bald head. The harsh snort of a little tug aroused all hands, and Jack grinned as a couple of Jersey fishermen on the trawl began to trip their anchor.

"Who's that man?" snorted Agent Schnorr, as Jack leaned against the rail.

"Only an old chum of mine, whom I picked up at Trieste as my head stoker. I can never manage these beach combers of a fire gang below, alone!" said McGregor.

"He is a dead game man!"

"Then,—" said the mollified Schnorr, "keep him on board. Pay him well;" and he approached big Sandy and whispered, "You may have to make a quick run for it! Hold on to him!"

Before the great bullet-headed, pig-eyed German was housed in the little cabin of the tug, the smart fishing smack was already skimming away to Dover pier.

"Ah! Greek and Greek!" mused Masterson. "I'll warrant now that old 'Shun Lee' Drage beats these two fellows to London, and he'll have a regular cloud of spies and detectives to pipe them off! The fun is just coming on! The ball will open when we strike Gravesend."

"Now, Jack!" cried McGregor, slapping him on the shoulder. "We are ordered to lay here ready till sundown, in waiting for a telegraphic signal. If we get no

countermand, then to crawl up to Gravesend with just enough speed to keep her nose out of the bank. We must not get there till nine to-morrow morning!"

"Why?" lazily asked Masterson.

"None of my business, or yours, either!" gruffly said Mc. "Old Schnorr is one of these German Jews who can keep a secret,—especially his own!"

It brought a storm of curses to First Officer Tommaso Corvini's lips when the "Scottish Chief" duly fell in, sailing in the wake of the "Cornaro" at sundown, and so, in procession, they dragged along by Margate, Whitstable and Sheerness, toward Gravesend.

"Blast my eyes!" roared old McGregor. "If we were not inside the Nore Light now, I would just back down on that black brute and shore him high and dry on the bank! We're in a regular hole, and,—the jig's up!"

With curses loud and deep for the thousands of pounds of insurance money wasted, McGregor dreamed all night that the ship was afire and sinking in the broad Thames Estuary!

He woke with a cold sweat on his brow, in the dim watches of the night!

"I might do it here,—now,—alone!" he whispered, and then he faltered, "Too late! They are 'on to us!' They would simply contest the policies! We must sneak away!"

While the "Alessandro Cornaro" was slowly boring up the muddy Thames towards Gravesend, and the white

flag with the black circled "K" gleaming out proudly at the mizzen,—there was an anxious midnight séance at the British Consulate in Smyrna.

Howard Vinton was wearied out with the long suspense of all these dreary days, now stifling in their heat! He marvelled not at the silence of Agathe, the Serpent, for Bouclair was now a restless spirit, haunting the corner rooms—even by day. The grim Turkish sentinel, however, still watched the doors of Bouclair's rooms, day and night!

The malevolent old Turkish hag also marched truculently at Agathe's side when she went out, and this only on rare occasions! The thrilling, singing voice was silent! The piano keys were left untouched, for, late at night, the murmur of busy voices in conference was heard in the salon adjoining Vinton's rooms. Messengers came and went at all hours!

There was an open secret on the Exchanges of Smyrna that a feverish agitation marked the London quotations of Levantine goods, and the voices of excitable speculators rose up in a loud chorus in the bazaars and counting rooms of Smyrna! When Enos Drage, still on guard at Dover, had sighted the huge tramp steamer so unwillingly chased into the mouth of the Thames, Howard Vinton, Fitzgerald and Van Lennep were called into a feverish activity by Drage's warning telegram of the arrival.

The long days had dragged away slowly, and now

the three secret friends awaited the momentary news of the seizure of the "Cornaro"!

It was a commendable prudence which brought Van Lennep, wrapped in a Turkish disguise, at night, to land on the mole in front of the Consulate, where the alert Foley was now, always on watch, armed to the teeth. Howard Vinton had openly indulged in some ceremonious festivities with the officers of the English squadron, and his three weeks of idle time had also produced some startling correspondence ornamenting the columns of both the European and American issues of the New York Herald.

In vain, a dozen dashing veiled Fatimas had tempted the wary young Milord with a gracefully lifted yashmak. In vain, the local business gossips had assailed Howard Vinton on the mole,—in the cafés, or even during his brief visits to the noisy gayeties of the "Cafés chantants."

The young man remained to all an impregnable mystery, and,—even the leaden-eyed Bouclair now classed him merely as a man dawdling along, killing time without a purpose and aimlessly scattering abroad a handsome income.

The generally accepted rumour that "Milord" was a secret agent of the British Government, an aristocratic "incognito," was apparently confirmed by his frequent visits to the British fleet!

The only daily sensation of Smyrna was the rising chatter as to the remarkable voyage of the "Cornaro"

and its stiffening effect upon British and Smyrniote speculations. Both Fitzgerald and Vinton shared Van Lennep's wonder at the aimless voyage.

The agent delivered his opinion in these words:

"Here we have the news of the tardy but safe arrival of this cargo. To-morrow the insurance will surely expire, when she drops anchor at Gravesend!

"Someone has certainly expended ten thousand pounds of good cash in this venture, the only result of which is to break prices, ruin consignees, and to entail a vast loss upon the hidden 'Komanos and Company,' and also upon Sassoon and Company,—unless they are well secured for their advances. I am in the dark! There's not a sign of bad faith or criminality here! Any fraud in the character of the cargo, the route taken on the voyage, any suspicious accident, would give us a sure hold upon all the parties caught on the ship. Either we have been wrong all along, or else they are just blinded fools, and doubly blind to their own interests!"

Vinton's secret knowledge burned silently in his breast! He had never divulged the false nature of the cargo to his friends in Smyrna, and he waited now only in a nervous exaltation for Drage's tiger leap upon the swindlers when the "Cornaro" was once in British customs hands!

"If I've had one, then I've had fifty Smyrniote merchants in the Consulate, to-day, demanding news of the arrival of this argosy of Komanos and Company!" said

the puzzled Consul. "And I have had to put up a sign: 'Lloyds' agency is not interested,'" added Van Lennep. "But some startling thing must soon occur!"

The appearance of Sergeant Foley in a state of excitement roused all three of the secret council to activity.

He handed the Consul a neat card.

"Read that! I've a strange thing to report!"

The pasteboard bore these words:

ALFRED MELLONI,

Dragoman.

Smyrna,

Turkey.

Cairo,

Egypt.

"Now," gasped the sergeant, "a fellow in grand Moslem garb just tackled me outside. He demanded to see Mr. Van Lennep, whom I denied as being here. I was astounded when he clapped me on the shoulder

"By Jove! It was 'Maloney of Ours,' whom McKillop Pasha years ago, made head drill-master for the Khedive's marine guard. He is simply coining money now as a dragoman, for the devil himself, wouldn't take him for an Irishman.

"'You're just my man, Sergeant Foley!' he whispered. 'Tell the Consul that I know that Mr. Van Lennep is in the Consulate! I've been laying out here on the watch. I am head dragoman for 'Caspari & Co.' in Alexandria and Cairo. They have their branch house

also here. Now, I dared not write. I've been closely watched!

“‘There's a whole gang of thieves meeting daily in bazaar hours down at Caspari's big carpet warehouse. It's the head men of “Komanos and Company!” Our house works in with these same Smyrna cut-throats!

“‘Now, they've had a divil of a miscarriage with the run of the big ship “Cornaro.” Somebody has chased her from Athens to the Nore and penned her up there! They swear that it's Van Lennep's work, and this renegade scoundrel Bouclair has offered two hundred pounds to the man who quietly puts Van Lennep out of the way! Warn him, for Heaven's sake, and meet me any night at the “Scottish Arms.”

“‘Tell the Consul, too, to look out for Lloyds' agent! He is under the shadow of death now!’”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ORDER OF ARREST!—OPIUM TAKES A RISE!—
BAFFLED!

THERE was a suspiciously formal elegance in Captain Enos Drage's “outer man” as he strolled into the office of “Schnorr and Co.” at the gloomy hour of half-past four on the evening of the day when Captain Nicolo and Managing Agent Schnorr had flitted away from the big tramp steamer at daybreak.

London was already overcast with a growing gloom of evening, and the wearied denizens of the dingy brick pile known as "Cadogan Buildings," Bishopsgate, were sullenly closing up for the night. "Shun Lee's" modish frock coat, his proper silk hat, natty red dogskin gloves and cane, lent quite a society glamour to the weather-beaten face which had so recently shone out from under the oilskins and sou'wester on the trawling smack.

A sturdy middle-aged man with an uncomfortable air of being in plain clothes, watched the calm Captain with the air of a trained nurse, a professional pall-bearer, or an expectant slick book-peddler! Bustling Ernest Schnorr gazed at the handsome pink pearl in Drage's four-in-hand tie and wondered at the visitor's unbusinesslike garb. Even Captain Dimitri Nicolo was impressed when the stranger said: "I believe that you are the agent of 'Komanos and Company of Smyrna?'"

"I am! What's your business?" said the suspicious German Jew, with a defiant glare.

"I wish to see the captain of the steamer 'Alessandro Cornaro,' now reported at the Nore!" quietly rejoined Drage.

"There he is!" uneasily replied Schnorr.

"State your business! Captain Dimitri Nicolo!" the agent added, walking away, and then he closed the door of the inner office. "Schnorr & Co.'s" den was a mass of crowded desks, high stools and book-littered corners, with grimy walls covered with dingy sailing announcements. "I wish to take a look at your manifest,"

politely said the visitor, who had forgotten to give his name. "I am interested in the cargo!"

Drage's fishy blue eyes were fixed upon the two men, who glowered back in silence. But there was now a ferocious gleam shining out of Dimitri Nicolo's eye, like the glare of a wild beast at bay. "You'll have to wait," huskily said Schnorr.

"The ship has not yet anchored; her voyage is not complete! You shall see no manifest yet!" The man in plain clothes stepped briskly forward. "I represent Her Majesty's customs. Do you refuse to show the manifest of the cargo now, upon proper demand, to an interested party?"

Captain Enos Drage drew out a packet of papers. The keen-eyed Schnorr caught the glance of a bill of lading. "I most absolutely refuse," answered Schnorr. "There is no order of court! You have no proper warrant of authority!"

"Do you also refuse?" said Drage, turning to Dimitri Nicolo. The sailor shook his head. "I show nothing! There is the agent!" "Then our business is elsewhere!" calmly replied the old veteran, as he moved to the door, followed by the silent official.

The rattle of a four-wheeler had not died away when Schnorr hastily dragged Nicolo out from the larger room and locked the door. The clerks had fled, and the glimmering yellow gas blinked in the darkening London streets.

Schnorr led the Greek out into the street. They

were half way across Blackfriars bridge, and their energetic cabby was the "observed of all observers" before the Greek corsair captain caught his breath.

"Where are you going?" he cried.

"Listen! I start you, now, down the river on a special engine! You can beat the regular train two hours! Take the first tug at Gravesend and go at once down the river and join the 'Cornaro.' Take command! Do not come up to the limits of the town! Keep your steam always up! Moor her to the first buoy! Make no customs declaration whatever! Mind you! Telegraph to me here for any needful orders. And be sure to keep all strangers off your ship! I'll have an answer from Smyrna by morning!

"We are ruined for life if those sealed hatches are ever opened here!"

"What shall I say?" demanded the startled Greek.

"Say nothing—not a word! You are only waiting my orders, and you don't know the location of your dock. That's all. I'll come down soon and we'll make a safe rendezvous on shore! Let Mate Corvini, the big engineer and that English head stoker, arm themselves well, and they are to obey your orders and defend the ship!"

Dimitri Nicolo was decidedly rattled. "If anyone had a legal order for any of the cargo, like that fellow who showed us one, we must break bulk!" sullenly growled the Greek.

"Hold your d— jaw—and—leave all that to me!

There are only four people but our own crowd who have bills of lading. I will get on their trail to-night—every one! They must be mine at any price!”

Before Captain Enos Drage joined the Secret Committee of Lloyds at Higginbotham’s mansion, Captain Dimitri Nicolo was a full third of the way to Gravesend, and his “special” was speeding along like the wind.

Chairman John listened to the rasping voice of Drage in silence, while the fellow committeemen turned the subject carefully over.

Ernest Schnorr was already darting about London, his blue eyes gleaming in the criminal’s furtive keenness, while Walden and Waddingham advised their chairman to see his solicitors at once and take the most energetic proceedings.

“That’s just what I propose to do,” Higginbotham replied. “But, first, our rat must get well within the trap! When the Captain makes his custom house declaration we have full legal power over the vessel and all its cargo, but not till then! I have borrowed this bill of lading for thirty-four cases of opium, just so as to give Captain Drage the right to demand to see the manifest.”

“Whose is it?” said Shun Lee, with some interest. “You should hold on to it! Buy it at once, so as to have all your legal rights to see the inside of that cargo hold!”

“I got it as a favour through one of my brokers,” said Higginbotham. “It’s endorsed to bearer. I don’t

know the owner, but, I'll have my broker buy it in to-morrow.

"You had better run down, Enos, to Gravesend by the first train; watch the anchoring of the ship; note the customs declaration, and then find out from the river pilot, what dock they will discharge at!

"Put your own secret service men on to carefully watch the 'Cornaro' night and day! By to-morrow night, I'll have my solicitor's opinion and also the bill of lading bought in and duly transferred on this fellow Schnorr's delivery books.

"I've heard of him before as a devilish slippery customer! We have them now nailed to the cross—what the Yankees call 'a dead thing!'"

"I've seen a dead thing rise up and crawl away on many a Chinese field of action! These fellows will die hard!" muttered Drage.

"I'll be off at five, and so I leave you men to your 'night-cap.'" "Good-night, Mr. Chief Inspector!" was the chorus which followed the old veteran to his lair.

But all night, Enos Drage tossed around in uneasy dreams. He was chasing the huge lead-coloured tramp steamer along the coast of China, and pouring into the fugitive the shells of his ringing howitzers from the swift "Shun Lee."

But the flag with the black circle and K flew defiantly still as the last volleys died away, and the face of scowling Dimitri Nicolo was pressed close to his own as the wily Greek whispered: "A stern chase is a long one!"

When the invigorated old veteran drove away in the murky morning to catch the Gravesend train, the huge "Alessandro Cornaro" was easily swinging, moored at a great red can buoy, two miles below Gravesend, with Captain Dimitri Nicolo in close conference with his three subordinates.

"Answer no pilot signal!" he said. "Let no one but a uniformed customs officer come on board—no matter what they say. I'll take a little sleep. Rouse me, Corvini, if there's any news. Remember to say that we are 'waiting orders.'"

After a long night spent in chasing all over the vast area of London, Agent Ernest Schnorr was stealing a few hours' rest. "Wake me, so that I can be on 'Change by eleven," he said, drowsily, to his secret partner, who was sitting on watch at his side.

"I've already got the three small holders under my control! Isaac Meyer, the other holder, has gone to Amsterdam," he grinned, "for four days. Now, if I can handle him and Sassoon and Company, there will never be a hatch lifted!"

Captain Enos Drage was a grumbling and discontented man as he sullenly nodded over his "Times" on the way down to Gravesend. He wrathfully recalled the defiant manner of both Schnorr and Nicolo.

The secret reports as to Ernest Schnorr which the Committee had obtained were not at all reassuring.

An industrious, secretive and reticent German Jew, with a large Mediterranean connection, and the com-

mand of some capital, Schnorr was a type of the sleek continental strangers refuging in London and undercutting the "British merchant." Master of all the continental tongues and several Levantine languages, Ernest Schnorr was voted on 'Change to be a "slick 'un."

Under his shaggy eyebrows his keen eyes devoured the contents of the paper held close to his nose, while the play of his crafty mind was masked by his immutable visage. "He is not going to die without a hard struggle," mused "Shun Lee." "This fellow is cool and smart—and he will die game!"

As the train ran on by Deptford, Greenwich, Woolwich and distant Tilbury came in view, Enos Drage was still undecided in his mind as he reached Gravesend. He rubbed his faded eyes as he gazed from the first rising ground above the Nore upon the broadening river which is the life of London. The great lead-coloured tramp was not visible when he hurried down to Gravesend pier and swept the bosom of the stream with his glass.

In the eight hundred yards' width of the broadening estuary he saw no four-masted leviathan with the circle K flag at her masthead!

"By Jove! It's quick work! Have they gone up to London, or have they already cut stick?" He hurried down to the customs office. "If I only had bills of lading for any considerable part of the cargo, I would ask the department to telegraph to the forts at Tilbury and Shoeburyness not to let her pass! Ah! We must

work on Sassoon; he has advanced great sums on a third of the cargo; and even my little measly bill of lading for thirty-four cases of the opium is not our own property yet!"

Drage felt in his heart that John Higginbotham was being neatly outwitted! In ten minutes, he was closeted with the chief officer guarding the old "Hythe," where, from the time of Domesday Book—galley and argosy, fleet and Indiaman, always had halted, before going up to London.

"Sorry that I cannot officially aid you, Captain Drage," said the official, now familiar with Drage's extraordinary powers. "You see, you have no proof to detain her! They are a very queer lot on board of that big tramp!

"We guard the line of London's jurisdiction, and here the voyage ends, and pilots and customs officers take charge. But this freighter did not run up into the port. It's certainly very mysterious. The captain, Nicolo, a Greek—a very cute-looking chap—came down here on a special engine from London this morning.

"He ran his ship just up over the line to end the voyage so as to free his insurance, by order of the agent, and has now dropped down and anchored in the Pool, six miles below here.

"He has stoutly refused to make his declarations, and says that it will be four or five days before his pier is ready at London docks, as the 'Alessandro Cornaro' is one of the largest merchant ships entering the

Thames. I have double sealed all his hatches over the Smyrna port seals, and I have a boat watching him below, with orders to report any strange happening.

"That's all I dare do now. I have not the right to keep an officer on the boat, as he is only moored to a buoy, with banked fires, and is awaiting orders."

"It is very strange," said the nonplussed Drage. "Did you see the ship's clearance?"

"Yes," said the official, scratching his head. "All in order. But this Nicolo is a regular sea lawyer. He won't declare! He won't show his manifest, and he refers me to Schnorr and Co., Cadogan Buildings, Bishopsgate."

"What can I do?" cried the enraged Drage.

"The voyage is surely ended," said the official. "I would go down and demand to see the manifest, and so claim a delivery forthwith, of your own goods, in kind. If he don't come to time, apply at once for an embargo, and get out an order of arrest! And then your solicitor must libel the ship for damages, as well as proceed to sue the agent."

"To tell you the truth, I've had fifty inquiries about that ship and her cargo already! What can I say in answer? Nothing!"

"Only this I do say: If you are a bona fide owner of even five cases of her cargo, you have your legal rights. Lord! There's been a hundred fruit brokers and opium dealers from London down here! The market

is on the jump, and the cargo is the heaviest ever cleared from Smyrna!

"Someone will make or break on this deal. Take my own launch and run down at once to the Pool! I'll send an officer along as a witness!"

Enos Drage started when the officer said: "By the way, this fellow has been telegraphing like mad to Smyrna—the town operator told me so—and he has got several cipher answers, too.

"You'll have to look very sharp to catch him napping! If he didn't look like a true Greek with those gold earrings, I'd swear that he was a disguised Yankee! He is as slick a chap as ever sailed up the river!"

Drage gazed at his trusty old Frodsham. "If Higginbotham only gets the control of the Sassoon stuff, or buys this one bill of lading, then we're in a strong position as bona fide owners. Till then, the Greek is ahead! I'll stir John up!"

In five minutes the little launch was throbbing down along the smooth waters, aided by the reflux tide. "Only twenty-four miles from the Exchange—and yet I dare not openly telegraph or telephone to John!

"If he plays his part well, we can have the order of arrest to-morrow. But, Johnny Greek may cut stick!"

The sleepy old river town with its beautiful market gardens lay spread along the river, fringed with its forests of masts, the argosies of a world's commerce.

There, in the silent reaches where Cabot and Frobisher once moored their world-finding caravels, the

anxious old veteran at length descried the great freighter. A thin blue smoke was pouring out from her funnels and she was heavily moored with a shackle to a huge buoy, a handy holding-on place for disabled ships.

When the little launch swept alongside the "Alessandro Cornaro" the forbidding face of Tommaso Corvini peeped out over the rail. An Italian nimbly ran down the gangway with a boathook in his hand, and roughly pushed the launch off.

Then, at short range, Corvini and Drage exchanged the "compliments of the season"!

In vain did Enos Drage storm and wave his bill of lading. "Capitano gone to London!" shrieked the Italian. "No man on a ship! Keep a' off! Keep a' off!" and, an ugly-looking revolver was gleaming in his hand as he spoke.

A shrill boatswain's whistle was soon heard sounding, and a crowd of baboon-faced Lascars and Malays quickly hoisted up the Jacob's ladder, so that the angered Enos Drage was powerless to climb the perpendicular sides.

"Better sheer off, sir," earnestly said the official witness. "Get the law on 'em, and we'll come down again and board her sure enough!"

With a heavy heart, Shun Lee Drage saw the "Cornaro" disappear behind him, her flag flying in triumphant derision as he raced away up the river on his return to Gravesend.

On the way back to London he nursed his wrath, but a distinct trail of sulphurous oaths was left behind the defeated emissary of Lloyds! "By Jove! That fraudulent cargo is in there, and it will yet come out! I swear it shall!"

He had telegraphed to John Higginbotham to meet him at the West end mansion as soon as possible.

Old Enos chafed alone in the library until at the hour of six, when three anxious-looking men joined him, but only to increase his troubles. There was no thought of turtle and turbot—and, for once in his life, John Higginbotham allowed the grave-faced butler to call in vain. "The Governor's rarely put out when he won't eat his dinner!" was the news which flew down to the servants' hall.

"Tell me all your day's adventures, Enos," sadly said Higginbotham.

"The deuce is to pay on 'Change about this ship, and the whole opium market has taken a frantic upward jump! The fruit brokers, too, are mobbing each other, and so, we are either off our reckoning or else we have the very fiend himself to fight!" Walden and Waddingham sadly sniffed the distant dinner, while old "Shun Lee" Drage concisely related his futile attempts to board the "Cornaro."

"The crazy pirate had 'shoot' in his eyes, and so I dared not proceed to extremities! So here I am!

"What's your luck?" "Poor enough!" gruffly said

Chairman John. "I'm going to see Sassoon, however, to-night, at his own house!"

"Did you see these advertisements?" said Walden. "They are in all the evening papers," and he slowly read:

"Steamer 'Alessandro Cornaro'—Smyrna!!!"

"All holders of bills of lading by the above-named steamer, now lying at Gravesend, will hear of matters of immediate advantage and profit by instantly addressing
X. Y. Z., Times Office."

"Now, what in heaven's name does all this new hubbub mean?" cried Waddingham. "The steamer is surely bewitched—a regular Pandora's box! I sent my private broker around to Schnorr & Co.'s office, as you requested, and there is a notice posted in three or four languages:

"'Steamer "Alessandro Cornaro," lying in lower Thames. Customs declarations are not yet made. No business transacted for four days regarding her cargo. Waiting orders.'"

The irate Waddingham proceeded: "When my broker insisted on seeing old Schnorr himself, the greasy Hebrew just pointed to the sign with a grin. 'Can't you read?' he said, and then he strolled out and locked his office.

"Now, what does all this covert mystery denote? There was a regular mob of middlemen worrying away at Schnorr about other deliveries. They have nothing to show for it, but the market is running up so they are all crazy for news!

"For there's nothing now on the way from Smyrna, and this vast opium speculation is going on to a regular fever!"

Enos Drage's ferret eyes were fixed upon the crest-fallen Higginbotham. "Did you not purchase the certificate for the thirty-four cases, so as to be safe as a bona fide holder?" Old John Higginbotham greatly hated to confess his defeat.

"I tried to, but the owner, 'Isaac Meyer,' a Levantine goods broker, has gone over to Amsterdam for four days. He has sent his partner up to my broker with a written demand for the bill of lading, which, of course, I have agreed to return in the morning.

"I offered a handsome bonus to the fellow myself, but he only wriggled around and said that his principal had demanded the bill of lading, and might before now have given someone else a delivery order based on it on a sale memorandum.

"I tried to get a fifty pound note into his hand, and then take a memorandum of the sale, but the agent was too sly. So, Enos, you had better give me back that bill of lading. If they call it in, I cannot force them to sell."

"Did you make him a smart offer?" said Drage, his courage sinking.

"I thought that I went far enough. I offered two hundred and fifty pounds bonus, and the highest price opium would touch in the month for the delivery order and a transfer for full value of the bill of lading!" The Chairman was dejected, as Drage said: "Then that settles it!"

"When a London Jew will let two hundred and fifty pounds go by—there's something bigger in sight!"

"Buy it in at all hazards!" cried both Walden and Waddingham in excited chorus.

"If I can—but I'm afraid that they are all alarmed and will act on the defensive now. They are fighting shy!" was Higginbotham's verdict.

"What did your solicitors say?" ruefully demanded Drage. "Why," uneasily replied the Chairman, "they agreed that the taking of advances upon a false cargo, the insurance of a false cargo, the uttering on false manifests and bogus bills of lading are all in themselves serious crimes, justifying an immediate embargo—and even an order of arrest.

"But, so far, we have not a single bit of proof save this romantic story of your young American friend at Smyrna. We must prove it. I am to see the solicitors at eleven to-morrow. You had better meet me there, Enos, for if I live till noon to-morrow I will buy Sassoon's whole cargo interest out and out, get an embargo,

open that ship's hatches, and then, by heavens, find what's in her!"

The great London merchant was at last on his mettle.

"I'll spend my own good yellow guineas to show up this daring fraud! That I will!" "I can't see where you can force a hold on these scoundrels," said Walden. "Whoever 'Komanos and Company' are, they are past-masters in the arts of knavery!

"Now, observe! The insurance policies are all void now! Drage reports that the big ship ran a few hundred yards into the jurisdiction of the lower river, known as 'London Port.'

"The customs officers say that her clearance papers are all duly regular. As to the insurance of a false cargo, Lloyds is now free—the risks are all vitiated—and you have earned a handsome marine premium.

"For the effecting of the false insurance, the Smyrna people are out of jeopardy! It was all done here. The agents here are either innocent, or else stand as innocent.

"There is no claim whatever to contest. We can punish no one here if the Smyrna laws have been violated. We can't even hold them for uttering false manifests.

"The captain has not yet made his declaration, and I am afraid that we can't force him to! He may lie for six months at the Pool, repairing machinery or 'waiting orders,' as he says. He is just over the line!

"If he does not place the alleged false manifests in

customs hands, we have no proof. Schnorr will not commit himself!

"To prove that the voyage has been a criminal one, that the bills of lading are fraudulent, we must become the owners for value of some of these bills of lading, and then, if we can force them to open hatches, the delivery of our cargo; the goods proving fraudulent and valueless, will surely hold the ship and all its officers, and we can then make reclamations on Smyrna!

"Here's this advertisement now—someone is already on the *qui vive*; we may not even be able to get hold of any cargo. If your American friend could only have got some cargo of his own on the ship!"

"Ah!" growled Drage, "that wretch Bouclair would not let a single stranger set foot on the ship in Smyrna, and as he himself gave all the shipping orders, no outsider could get a chest of cargo on her!

"There's only four little outside lots straggling, and Sassoon is our only chance. A last chance!"

"You are right," groaned Higginbotham.

"We are absolutely without proof, unless we get an order of arrest or embargo, they can quietly laugh at us! We can only chase them down and put them to great expense, but then we are spending pound for pound with them, and, once out of English jurisdiction, all our work is Love's Labour Lost!"

"You are right," was old Shun Lee's dictum. "They

might run into some foreign port and dump that whole stuff into the bonded warehouses."

"I fail to see where that would help them," said the Chairman. "Ah! Yes," cheerfully chimed in Waddingham, "there's a regular Mediterranean gang of rascals who are closely leagued together. I'll warrant that all this stuff is properly put up to look well. They will warehouse the stuff! Get regular receipts, and then, through innocent hands, get large advances up to seventy-five per cent of market value, let the stuff lie, and divide the money and cut stick!

"This 'imitation cargo' is also used by Polish Jews and fraudulent bankrupt dealers, who sometimes cover the imposing stuff with a heavy fire insurance, and then it strangely disappears in well-managed flames!"

"Which proves that there is more than one way to skin a cat!" remarked the old Chairman. "Let us have our dinner, and I'll go over to Sassoon's. He is our very last hope! If he controls the cargo on which their house has advanced its cash, I'll warrant you that I'll have out an order of arrest by to-morrow night!"

There was little said at the substantial feast of the great merchant, but Captain Enos Drage saw "through a glass, dimly," the chief inspectorship very much farther off than when the "Alessandro Cornaro" first crept out of the Channel mists into the welcome shelter of the deep, tranquil pool of the Downs—far inside the wreck-dotted reefs of the Goodwin Sands!

"It seems as if the wolf had turned, and the hunter

himself was in the trap!" he bitterly mused. "I shall be up late with Sassoon," the host said, as they separated. "I've made up my mind to have our detectives watch the steamer!"

"Remember, Enos, we meet at the solicitor's at eleven!" And the camp-fires of Lloyds' secret army were not glittering as gaily on this night as the twinklights of the well fortified camp of Komanos and Company.

Mr. Ernest Schnorr sat late into the night counselling with his secretly banded confederates. Captain Dimitri Nicolo received his final orders for guidance. "Don't you stir a single turn of the screw without orders from me!"

"Let no one on board! You will have my definite orders by telegraph or messenger! Be ready to sail at a moment's notice, if our people should get into any trouble here."

"Sail! Where to?" stammered the Greek.

"Anywhere—out of English waters," growled Schnorr. "We never were so hard put before. And, if we are balked on this proceeding, that snivelling cur Van Lennep shall die—I swear it! That's all. And everyone who has helped his dirty spy work in Smyrna! This trick has been done from there!"

The red-bearded German Jew sat long alone after his subordinates had departed.

Chart and map lay spread out before him, his simple Schoppen of beer and his pipe comforted him, as he

studied for an hour; and then he opened a little safe in his gloomy, squalid chambers, and took out a private cheque book.

"It's hard!" he groaned. "Isaac Meyer is a Hebrew, and a hard, hard man! But the job must be done! If I pick up the other two bills of lading—then, if I can handle Sassoon from the other end, the ship can safely make the run! It only ties up ten thousand pounds! But, if Bouclair loads that on the insurance all right, we are safe, and the golden harvest will be reaped! There's no other course! It's Hobson's choice now!"

It was an hour after his usual time when the careful Ernest Schnorr entered Cadogan Buildings and ran over his mail. A glance here and there enabled him to set his two shock-headed clerks at work.

"I'll be back in three or four hours! If any telegrams come, Windmüller, bring them over to Einstein's Coffee House. You will find me over there." The clerk nodded and only pushed his pen faster.

In ten minutes, Ernest Schnorr was closeted in an obscure restaurant inner room with three or four Semitic individuals of a greasy magnificence. "Well, Morris! Jacob!" he cheerily cried. "What news?" "We have found the men vot holds the two outside bills of ladings," sputtered Morris, as a motherly-looking Buda Pest Jewess served the beer and brought out the cigars.

It was a house famed for "Kosher" cooking, and sharp bargains, smuggled diamonds, stray jewels, shady

notes and stolen bonds often changed hands here under the eyes of the portly Rebecca, who was both sly and "Kosher," as regarded her own underhand trade.

No minion of the law or Christian spy could ever manage to pounce down upon those whom Rebecca had taken to her full-bosomed heart!

Schnorr produced an abstract of the manifest. "They have answered the advertisements?" "Yes! One has a hundred and fifty boxes of raisins. The other only ten boxes of opium!"

"Good goods! Real goods, too!" snickered Morris.

"Did you get the marks and names?" anxiously said Schnorr. "All right! We were very careful," was the eager answer.

"And—what do they want?" said Schnorr. "Oh! About double price only!" said Morris, figuring up a few stray calculations on a greasy Hebrew journal.

"Go off and bring them at once to the office. Give Windmüller their cards. Be sure that you turn in the bills of lading to him, and hurry up. Come back here at two o'clock for luncheon with me. Be sure to buy—at any price!"

"Now for Isaac Meyer!" mused Schnorr, as he paid the bill and exchanged a few low spoken words with the admiring Rebecca, who stood there near him with a pulpy-faced, overgrown child in her arms, plucking with true Hebraic eagerness at her gleaming diamond bosom pin.

Turning down into a maze of dingy side alleys,

Ernest Schnorr then entered a little twelve-by-nine corner office, where a battered sign, "Goldstein and Co., Merchandise Brokers," drearily met the eye.

There was a single dingy inner room, and Schnorr threw open the door.

"Where's your partner?" he roughly said to a middle-aged foreigner, who never ceased his writing or raised his head.

"Been here and gone—back at twelve!" was the response. "He's gone over to the Exchange. They tell me that opium is running up to balloon prices!"

Schnorr's face flushed in anger as he turned. "Have him wait for me, surely, here at twelve. I'll be back! The low dog! Is he conspiring too, now?" muttered the shipping agent, who quickly called a hansom and drove back to the haunt of Rebecca.

A cry of joy escaped his lips as he read a telegram silently handed him by the velvet-eyed Rebecca.

"So," he mused, "if I get Isaac Meyers' bill of lading, then, in four days we will have gotten every single bit of the cargo under our own hand!"

He checked off every single name from his consignee list of the "Cornaro's" freight. "Caspari at Athens. Back in four days. Will settle Sassoon's agent here. They will cable to London and withdraw. He telegraphs his acceptance. We will cable when advances are paid. Then hold freight and notify Sassoon. Your plan is approved."

The signature, "Komanos and Company, Emile

Bouclair, Secretary," was the attestation of the good news. The overjoyed Ernest Schnorr's cup of gladness ran over when his puffing agents dashed in, Morris in the lead.

"All is finished, and Windmüller has both the bills of lading in the safe!" There was the unwonted ardour of a bottle of the happy Rebecca's best Tokayer, and Ernest Schnorr departed to the conquest of Isaac Meyer.

"Blast them all! I can defy them now!" said Schnorr, as he rattled along back to Goldstein's.

"But, Van Lennep must be fixed before we work the plan out. I'll write to Bouclair to-night to the old address at Scio! They can easily send it over by a man!"

For, Mr. Ernest Schnorr now contemplated "a deed without a name!" But he rallied his wits as he saw a thin, white-faced young fellow of thirty, with overhanging temples, greasy, dark clustering curls, a red, sensual mouth, and staring black eyes, furtively gazing at him out of Goldstein and Co.'s one window.

"Come in! We are alone!" said Meyer in a slippery, easy voice. "I had been out on business. Now, how do we stand this morning?"

Schnorr came to the point at once. "Meyer, I called to take up that opium bill of lading of yours, if you care to sell it. We've got a large cargo, and it may be weeks before we will get a dock. The 'Cornaro' is the largest vessel in the Thames to-day!"

"Vell, my fren'," lisped Meyer, an eager fire lighting up his crafty eyes, "what's your terms?" Ernest Schnorr felt the pressure of his private cheque book in his pocket. He tried to look unconcerned as he said, quietly: "Highest market rates—and—a good bonus!"

"Vot bonus?" placidly murmured Meyer, his Semitic accent returning in the delicious excitement of the welcome chaffering.

"A hundred pounds!" impressively said Schnorr, now gazing steadily at the young broker. Meyer laughed an oily derisive laugh. "Opium is kiting now! Why, I can take market rates and get three times your bonus! I wouldn't hear of it!"

"What's your price?" demanded Schnorr, in a surly tone—"bonus and all?" The slender young fellow figured in silence for a moment and never raised his head, as he quietly said: "Five thousand pounds for the bill of lading, and cash down!"

Schnorr sprang to his feet in a purple rage. "You're a mean robber!" he cried, shaking his fist as he spoke.

And then, a greasy smile stole over Isaac Meyer's colourless face.

"So are you, Schnorr, and you know it! One touch of your hand and I'll call the police! Now, I'll make you discharge your ship! Get out of here! If you want that bill of lading you'll have to pay my price. I can hold it to speculate on it, and easily make the money. But I give you notice that I demand my cargo as it is!"

Then, with a quiet sneer, he quickly passed out of the door, leaving the burly agent white with rage.

Before the crestfallen Schnorr was fairly seated at his luncheon, Mr. Isaac Meyer drove directly to the office of Jared Arrowsmith, the head broker of the mighty Higginbotham.

"See here!" he cried, as the Englishman sprang to meet him; "I'll not sell you my bill of lading, but I'll make you this offer: I'll take five hundred pounds bonus, and go on board at Gravesend with your agent, tender the freight in gold and demand the delivery. If they make it, the opium shall be yours if you pay me my price! If they refuse to break bulk and deliver, I get the five hundred pounds bonus for my trouble, and I am then free to sue them, or else sell my bill of lading as I choose!"

"Done!" said Arrowsmith. "Come down here to-morrow morning at nine, and I'll send a good man down with you!"

And gayly did Isaac Meyer return to his dingy lair. "Somebody wants this thing pretty badly now!" the mystified young cormorant murmured. "I'm sure of this five hundred pounds extra. If I sell to Arrowsmith, he, too, must pay my price! If Schnorr wants it, he shall sweat, the brute!"

There was a lumpy boy waiting with a note at Goldstein's, a communication which expressed Schnorr's idea of the Mosaic law of half and half!

Meyer simply grinned as he tore the note up and

threw the tatters away. "Tell him there's no answer! Tell him that I'm no fool, and all I want is for him to let me alone!"

And hence, when the returning son of Rebecca gave Mr. Ernest Schnorr the impudent message he cursed vainly in a good-fashioned piratical style.

For the first time he felt sure that a snaky cordon of fire was closing down on "Komanos and Company."

"I've made an enemy—foolishly, too!" he growled. "What will this dirty rogue not try to do?" And in the dim watches of the long night Mr. Schnorr had not succeeded in studying the problem out.

When he timidly ventured to send a note to Goldstein the next day that he would "take the property," a verbal message told him that "Mr. Meyer had left town!"

He vaguely wondered where the Israelitish speculator had gone, but he did not wait without information for many hours.

In the hours while Schnorr and Meyer battled, Mr. John Higginbotham had been wrestling with his grave solicitors, and Captain Enos Drage chafed like a hound in the leash, while the principals solemnly debated the baffling attitude of Messrs. Sassoon and Company.

"We are truly interested in nearly a third of the cargo of the 'Cornaro,'" had said the great head of the house. "Our Smyrna agent advanced certain sums to Caspari and Company. We claim only our advances,

interest, and the usual profits of a consignment. We have no grounds whereon to base any charges of fraud, but if you decide, as representing Lloyds, to take the risk and pay the expenses, we will allow you to use our firm name to take out an order of arrest or embargo, but only subject to all the merchant rights of Caspari and Co. in Smyrna as our original shippers!"

"Now, do you see, Captain," remarked Higginbotham, "they will take out the order, but it shows our hand to the enemy, and, moreover, it is a serious matter!"

Whereat the solicitors decided "to turn it all over till the morning," and then to lay out a course of action. For, the acute Schnorr had already reported the machinery as out of order, and also, that no dock was available. "We will have to examine into the case, set up these facts, and proceed with due caution," said the solicitors.

"Yes! They always do 'proceed with due caution,' but even a half loaf is better than no bread!" mused Drage.

But his anxious spirit swelled within him as he learned at dinner of the appointment made with Isaac Meyer! He yearned once more to walk the deck of the "Alessandro Cornaro" as a conqueror, and while Schnorr and Drage slept restlessly thinking of the veiled conflict, Isaac Meyer slumbered like a child and dreamed of the double event. For he would come down like a wolf on the fold now!

Captain Enos Drage was in a very sour humour as he promptly reported at Blackfriars bridge early the

next day to meet Jared Arrowsmith, the private broker of the mighty Chairman. His morning mail from Southsea had brought to him a letter from Miss Lavinia which filled him with a new and serious alarm.

"The Child" was manifesting symptoms of an oversolicitude as to the fate of the lonely young American at Smyrna, indicative of an acute cardiac disturbance.

"Lily's feelings are to me a mystery, and a great sorrow! I cannot understand her! You must reassure her, for now she is pining needlessly. My comfort seems to be naught to her!" "Poor Lavinia!" mused Drage. "It's a side of life that you do not understand, true enough! I must recall Vinton out of the dangers which threaten forever anyone known to be connected with us. But, there's the Herald business to mask his purpose!"

The old captain secretly feared for Van Lennep also now, as the letter which brought on the warning of the transformed "Maloney of Ours," was an ominous sign.

"Of course they will try to strike back!" The captain had followed the New York Herald, wherein a series of brilliant articles upon the Levant proved that Howard Vinton was calmly following out his dual rôle.

"If I could only get there," the old captain sighed. There was a brief introduction by Arrowsmith at the Blackfriars station. Broker Arrowsmith handed Drage a bag of gold.

"Here is ten pounds more than the legal freight and all possible charges on Mr. Isaac Meyer's consign-

ment of opium. You are to make a formal demand for the delivery of the thirty-four cases in kind, on our behalf. Mr. Meyer, who is speculating on this consignment, is to settle with me if we can get a quick delivery, and he goes down only as a silent witness!

"We have agreed to take this merchandise off his hands if delivery can be effected, but our own option expires to-night if we cannot get at the goods. In case of a refusal, you can then return the bills of lading to Mr. Meyer and bring us back our money. If the bills of lading are purchased by us later, we wish to sue for all our rights if denied, otherwise he can sue himself or settle!"

It was a grimly silent voyage to Gravesend. Captain Drage instinctively distrusted his young Hebraic companion, who pored over a German paper and sucked away at an old student pipe.

The keen young Israelite had duly sized up Enos as a secret officer of the law. But, his fishy blue eyes showed no feeling. "I am all right either way. There's a craze on the market. If one does not buy at my price, another will!" He had easily fathomed the weakness of the blustering Schnorr.

As Enos Drage neared Gravesend, he revolved a thousand plans of communicating with the cooped-up Jack Masterson.

"No! It won't do!" he sighed. "One sign would be enough to cause distrust, and poor old Jack would be sandbagged and tossed overboard, or else chased off the

ship! If they mean to cut and run, he is my only mainstay!" The twenty-five thousand pounds once so temptingly near, and the promised Inspectorship, seemed to be now as far off as the Himalayas.

The customs chief found time to whisper as the launch was made ready: "Several people have tried to board the boat to-day, and all have been driven off! I'll send down an officer with you! The captain is on board. He reports his machinery as out of order, and no dock assignment yet. The last is a lie—for the dock authorities secretly telegraph me the agent has not even applied for a berthing!

"We are all watching her here night and day, under secret orders. I'll have my man hail her, and be sure to get you an interview.

"Look out for this young fellow with you! He's a shady party and the well-known agent of a band of German Jew smugglers! I know him!"

There was no hostile band gathered as the customs launch neared the huge "Alessandro Cornaro," still lazily dragging away at the double shackles to the buoy. A stern anchor kept her from swinging across the stream.

Captain Dimitri Nicolo, gold-banded cap in hand, met the party at once on the quarter deck, and politely conducted them to the cabin. As the party entered, Enos Drage caught sight of Mr. Jack Masterson contentedly fishing over the rail, and with an exercise of nerve the imprisoned chief stoker never lifted his head.

"My chief engineer, Mr. McGregor," said the wary Greek captain. "He always translates for me!" The three visitors bowed to Sandy, who whispered to a cabin boy, and the usual courtesies of nautical hospitality were tendered.

"And now, gentlemen, what is your business?" sharply demanded Nicolo, when all hands had spliced the main brace, save Enos, who accepted his usual cigar.

"You are the captain, now in charge of the 'Alessandro Cornaro?'" briskly said Drage. The Greek bowed.

"Then, sir, I demand the delivery of the merchandise which is covered by this bill of lading. Here in gold is the legal freight and charges!" said Drage. "Please to count it, and to observe that I have added ten pounds for the expense of opening the hatches. The consignee, Mr. Isaac Meyer, is also here, ready to sign for you a receipt for the goods!"

At a curt nod from McGregor, the captain counted the money, examined the bills of lading, and then replaced the golden coins.

"I have not yet made my declaration," he said. "My machinery is all out of order. My ship is unable to proceed! I have no dock berth yet assigned, and so I refuse to open the hatches without the positive order of Ernest Schnorr, the local agent of the owners!"

When Nicolo had finished these words, he rose politely, but decidedly, and bowed, cap in hand.

"Who are the owners of the vessel?" demanded Drage.

"You must see Mr. Schnorr!" dryly answered Nicolo.

"We jointly demand to see this freight, and we make our demand now for instant delivery!"

"See Mr. Schnorr!" again remarked Nicolo.

"Will you put your refusal to deliver the goods in writing?" cried the incensed old veteran. "I have now to request you to leave the ship! I decline any further answers," said Nicolo. "You can proceed by law as you wish. I am 'waiting orders,' and I am free of all customs control!"

"He speaks the truth," whispered the sorrowful customs inspector. The discomfited party slowly arose and filed down into the launch.

Before it had gained headway, it drifted down under the spot where Jack Masterson was fishing. The quick-witted old man o' war's man perfectly understood Enos Drage's furtive signal "to stick to the ship!" But he dared not to utter a single word!

His own life was, even now, at the mercy of "Komanos and Company," standing sternly at bay.

"I do not see what I can do," lisped Isaac Meyer. "I will now take back my bills of lading and see my solicitors. This ship may lie here for a month yet, and I may lose a trade. My time is money!"

The disgusted captain handed over the papers without a word. "I wish both of you gentlemen to make careful notes of the interview," he said. "The courts alone can now help us!"

Enos Drage was fain to linger an hour in consultation with the superior officers of Customs who were now gathered at Gravesend, while his strange speculative friend Mr. Isaac Meyer, sped away to the London train.

"These fellows seem to know what they are up to!" said the Chief of Customs, to the enraged old veteran.

"This chap Nicolo has been getting to-day a shower of telegrams through Reuter's Agency and the Agence Havas of Paris, for the last two days. We have had all the duplicates sent up to London for deciphering, as Agent Schnorr has absolutely refused to disclose the owners of the ship. He simply says that 'Bouclair of Smyrna' loaded her for 'Komanos and Company,'—for whom he is the local agent. It's a very grave responsibility to embargo that ship,—it entails great expense—and a vast trouble as to legal complications."

"Blow the expense!" remarked Drage. "By Heavens! I swear that I will be down here to-morrow, with an order of arrest!"

All the way home to London, Captain Drage grumbled, but his quondam partner of the morning was in high glee.

When Isaac Meyer descended at Blackfriars Station,—the "partner" who used "temporarily" the convenient name of Goldstein, grabbed him in his arms, with an anxious perspiration beading his Hebraic forehead. There was "business" in every thrill of his husky voice.

"Schnorr is a vaitin',—a vaitin'," he gasped. "Be careful! Take a fly and ged down, and schtop at der

corner, and walk in—just, easily like! Don't make no mistake!" The blue eyes of Meyer glittered hawklike. "Then, we've got him! I must hurry, and get my money. For, that ship will be in trouble, to-morrow!"

Mr. Ernest Schnorr had shifted the burden of responsibility, and he longed to close the matter, for Bouclair had wired him: "Buy the Meyer consignment at any price! We close all with Caspari to-morrow!"

The humiliated ship agent never even lifted his head as Isaac Meyer strolled back into his office.

"Hello,—you here!" the young speculator roughly said. "Come for another quarrel? What is it? I'm now going home!"

Then, Ernest Schnorr produced a bundle carefully from his breast pocket after closing the door. "I'll just take those papers! Just endorse those bills of lading to 'Komanos and Company!'"

Isaac Meyer counted out the bundle of Bank of England notes.

"You're five hundred pounds short here!" he rasped out. "I charge that for a day's lost time and for your snarling impudence of yesterday!"

"I have not the money with me!" groaned Schnorr.

"Oh! Your cheque will do. You've always got some money in bank—Mr. Schnorr!" pleasantly said Isaac Meyer, as he filled out a regular mercantile invoice.

He pocketed the notes and cheque and then tossed the papers on the desk, when they were signed!

"I'm going to shut up!" he roughly said.

And, when alone, he was just as happy as Captain Drage, to whom Higginbotham had just delivered the order of arrest of the "Cornaro," on behalf of Sassoon and Co.!

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